

PUBLIKACJA WSPÓLFINANSOWANA ZE ŚRODKÓW UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ W ZAKRESIE PROGRAMU  
KRAJOWEGO FUNDUSZU AZYLU, MIGRACJI I INTEGRACJI – „BEZPIECZNA PRZYSTAŃ”

**AFGHANISTAN – „EVERYDAY LIFE IN KABUL”**

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# **Afghanistan “Everyday life in Kabul”**

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**AFGHANISTAN – „EVERYDAY LIFE IN KABUL”**

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## Introduction

The authors of this compilation tried to present as much information concerning the everyday life of Kabul residents as possible, and they tried to do this in a reader-friendly manner. The contents of this report were created based on personal experiences and observations of the author, who is from Afghanistan, as well as conversations with Afghans living in the past and currently in Kabul, which were carried out for the purposes of this compilation, and based on information from the Afghan media, including social media. Some parts of this report contain references to specific legal acts applicable in Afghanistan.

This compilation is aimed at governmental and non-governmental institutions, public benefit organisations, academic centres and individuals, whose job is associated with Afghanistan and its residents, or who are interested in this topic.

The names and terms occurring in the contents of this document in the Dari language were written by the authors using a phonetic transcription, based on the rules of Polish orthography.

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# 1. Ethnic and socio-economic structure of Kabul

Kabul has fulfilled the role of Afghanistan's economic, administrative and political centre since XX century. It is located at the crossroads of significant international trade routes, which lead to Uzbekistan in the north and to Pakistan in the south. Due to the largest number of enterprises and banks, the capital is the biggest business centre in the entire country. It is a home to many ethnic groups, characterised by various social statuses and different degrees of devotion to tradition. This makes Kabul exceptionally diverse and rich in terms of culture.

## 1.1. Process of urbanisation

Kabul constitutes one of the fastest developing cities in the world. The first mass migrations to the Afghan capital occurred in the 1980s and they were associated with the displacement of population from rural areas affected by the conflict<sup>1</sup>. The conquest of Kabul by the Taliban, which occurred in the mid-90s, as well as their strict law, resulted in the fact that residents left the country on a massive scale and population of the capital decreased by half. Subsequent sudden influx of population into Kabul occurred at the beginning of XXI century, due to intervention of the USA. During that time, Afghans living in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran were lured by the perspective of the Taliban's fall and returned to Afghanistan. Kabul expanded by 11 districts in just a dozen or so years and now it has 22 of them. The arriving population settled on the city's outskirts and created entire housing estates, which were subsequently incorporated into the city. It should be emphasised that the official urbanisation plan of the city does not cover most housing estates, hence it is common to refer to them as informal housing estates<sup>2</sup>.

The districts in Kabul do not have names and they are marked by ordinal numbers. Each district consists of several boroughs, which in turn have names<sup>3</sup>. The most popular borough in

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of 1979, a nine-year military intervention of the Soviet Union, which supported the Afghan government against the mujahideen backed by the USA, began in Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> Informal housing estates are called *bi naghse* in the Dari language, which literally means without a map, without a plan, or *zur abad*, which literally means forcefully built.

<sup>3</sup> An example of address describing a flat in Kabul: Ghala Nadžara 3/19, Hesa Dowwom Kheir Chane, Nahila 11, Kabul - Ghala Nadžara street no. 3, house no. 19, Kheir Chane borough, section 2, district 11, Kabul.

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Kabul is Wazir Akbar Chan<sup>4</sup> located in the tenth district, which is commonly called *Green Zone*, due to the presence of numerous law enforcement services and checkpoints during the stationing of international forces. The vast majority of diplomatic facilities, headquarters of NGOs, leading media organisations, telecommunication companies and state hospitals are located there.

One of the oldest and most prestigious boroughs is Darul Aman<sup>5</sup> in the sixth district. Its name comes from the palace, which is located there and now fulfils the function of a museum. Furthermore, this borough is also the location of the Russian embassy building, as well as the building in which Polish diplomats used to work until 2014. Moreover, the best schools are located in these two boroughs.

The issues associated with spatial planning and city development are the responsibility of the Ministry of Urban and Land Development. Despite the fact that a lot of financial resources have been invested in municipal services since 2001, poor urban infrastructure and very quick population growth are the reasons that many Kabul residents do not have access to basic services (e.g. septic tanks, running water). The roads are not adapted to the population living in the capital, which means that gigantic traffic jams are often created. Furthermore, the streets are characterised by poor condition and they are unpaved in the informal part of the city, so there is a lot of dust in the air.

The slums can be found in every borough of Kabul, even those perceived as the richest and most prestigious ones. Diversity and interpenetration of the rich and the poor population are perfectly illustrated by the view from the Wazir Akbar Chan hill, from which it is possible to see residences, villas, embassies and a large hospital to the south, and slums to the north, at the foot of the mountain. It should be emphasised that contrary to popular belief, the poor housing estates are characterised by a relatively high level of safety. The entire families live there, also families with small children (do these children go to school?), and people know each other, so they take care of each other's safety. Social life in the slums does not differ

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<sup>4</sup> Wazir Akbar Chan – a son of Dost Mohammad Khan, who ruled in the first half of XIX century and who is famous for his role in the battles with the British during the First Anglo-Afghan War.

<sup>5</sup> Darul Aman Palace - a palace constructed in the 1920s by King Amanullah Chan. It was destroyed many times during armed conflicts in Kabul. Moreover, it was recently restored and functions as a museum.



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significantly from social life in the city. Moreover, the weddings with live music are organised there<sup>6</sup>.

One of the reasons for growth in the Kabul's urban population during the last decades is the migration of people from conflict zones. The lack of security, as well as fights between government forces and rebels resulting in the killing of civilians, made the villagers flee to better guarded areas.

Furthermore, the construction boom occurring at the beginning of XXI century, numerous investments, expansion of government administration, as well as employment offered by international entities, attracted many Afghans to Kabul. It should be emphasised that a significant part of the capital's population was completely dependent on government and international employment. Therefore, sudden and unexpected collapse of the government and takeover of power by the Taliban left many families without jobs and livelihoods.

Not everyone who emigrated to Kabul in search of employment brings their family there after finding it. The costs of living in Kabul are high in comparison to other provinces, so it is not uncommon for a worker to move his family to the capital only after getting a steady and well-paid job.

Every year, the capital attracts seasonal workers in the sector of trade and services. One of the groups periodically migrating to Kabul are Uzbeks, who leave during summer their permanently inhabited northern regions of the country and come to Kabul in order to get work - mainly in the construction sector. Moreover, many of the migrants to Kabul are also self-employed or part-time workers.

Among numerous urban population of Kabul, a certain part of people are those returning from abroad. Some of them do not return to their home provinces, because their hope to undertake another attempt to leave the country. The capital offers much more opportunities for employment and thus allows getting funds for the next trip.

Furthermore, Kabul also attracts young people who want to study. The capital is characterised by the largest number of universities in the country. The most prestigious ones are state universities: Kabul University, Marshall Fahim Military Academy<sup>7</sup> and the University

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<sup>6</sup> Weddings in the slums are known as *czahar zanu*, which means weddings in cross-legged sitting.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall Fahim - his real name was Mohammad Qasim Fahim and he was an Afghan politician who served as vice president during Hamid Karzai's term of office. He died of a heart attack in 2014.

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of Technology. Each university has its own dormitory, and until 15 August there were also female dormitories. Until 2018, the national exams were organised, on the basis of which people with the highest number of points were selected and then admitted. However, during the last decades (two?), Hazaras constituted the overwhelming group of students. At the end of 2018, the then-president Ashraf Ghani, who was perceived as pursuing a policy favouring Pashtuns, introduced a new examination plan, according to which 25% of new students were supposed to be candidates from less developed regions. This was aimed at promoting the sustainable development of human capital at the provincial level, in order to improve the quality of life in these areas. The above-mentioned plan has been criticised for limiting the access to universities for talented students, as well as the risk of lowering the level of education in order to adjust it to the candidates.

After 2001, there has been an increase in the number of private universities in Kabul. Over 60 non-public universities functioned in Kabul until 15 August. Currently, there is a risk that many of them will be closed due to the policy of new government. It is estimated that approx. 30 percent of all students have left the country. The students who remain either lost their motivation to study or are no longer able to pay tuition fees due to financial difficulties. Some of the women, who studied under previous rules, do not agree with the principles of gender segregation and the imposed dress code, so they quit. Other women are afraid to go to college due to the fact that telephones and computers are controlled by the Taliban.

It is worth to note the characteristic tenancy system functioning in Afghanistan, which is different from the European one. The tenant pays the amount of money specified by the landlord. Upon leaving the property, the full amount is returned, so the tenant actually lives there for free and covers only the utility costs. The benefit for the landlord is the cash that the landlord can invest. Many people in Kabul use this form of tenancy.

Kabul is the city characterised by the most expensive housing and land value in the entire country. Despite the conflict that had lasted for years, the experts were noting a price bubble in the housing market. Before the fall of the government, house prices in the formal part of the city ranged from 70 000 USD to 500 000 USD, depending on the borough and condition of the building. As a result of the crisis, currently in some boroughs the prices have dropped by as much as 50 percent.

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Kabul is surrounded by mountain ranges, therefore the mixture of exhaust fumes and polluted air does not leave the city area, which makes Kabul one of the most polluted cities in the world. The smog is especially troublesome during winter and at night, when the residents use various rubbish as fuel, including tires and plastic. There are no precise official statistics, however it is estimated that 5 000 people died in 2021 in the entire Afghanistan (10 percent in Kabul alone) from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases caused by the contaminated air<sup>8</sup>.



A housing estate consisting of new blocks of flats in one of the Kabul's boroughs. Photograph by Naim Atarud.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dw.com/fa-af/air-pollution-killed-5000-people-in-kabul-in-2020/a-56211969>

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### **1.2. Integration of people coming to Kabul**

People coming to Kabul settle in the above-mentioned so-called informal housing estates, the creation of which resulted from a high demand for new places of residence. Nevertheless, they are not covered by the city's urbanisation plan. Ethnic origin largely determines the choice of a borough or a district by people coming to the city. Individual ethnic groups or tribes settle among their own, and usually live in a closed circle of family and relatives. Very often large families live in small premises, where there are several or even a dozen people per room. Women usually take care of the house, sew and cook. They rarely have a life outside their house and they do not go shopping. This results from the fact that they are mostly rural families with a traditional approach to the position and role of women in society.

Due to the high level of unemployment and poverty, most people are busy with solving their own problems, struggling with the necessity to provide basic needs for their families, including food and shelter. As a result, people are not eager to help others, because they themselves are in need. Moreover, they do not have much to offer.

### **1.3. Safety in Kabul**

Similarly to other large cities in Afghanistan, Kabul struggles with the problem of organised and common crime. Since 2014, its gradual growth has been noted. The following crimes have become more frequent: murder, armed robbery, theft, kidnapping of adults and children, extortion and drug trafficking offenses. In 2017-2019, about eight thousand criminal cases were registered, and even more in 2020. For this reason, the Ministry of the Interior has even issued a ban on motorcycles, which constitute the main method of travel for criminals<sup>9</sup>. More and more frequent corruption among law enforcement and the judiciary, as well as the inability and unwillingness to apprehend criminals, contributed to increase in anarchy. The pandemic, which had a strong negative impact on the Afghan economy, has only intensified this process. The stores have become the most vulnerable sector of economy. Despite lower

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/21/world/asia/kabul-dogs-crime.html>

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daily income, the owners of stores decided to shorten their working hours due to the fear of evening robberies.

Since the Taliban took power in Kabul, there has been a sharp decline in the level of common crime. This was caused by the fear of severe punishments imposed by the Taliban in the 1990s for committing various kinds of crimes. Nevertheless, high level of unemployment, the lack of a fully organised government and functioning police force have caused crime to increase again. Robberies, armed assaults and ransom kidnappings are still occurring.

Moreover, there is a new phenomenon in Afghanistan that involves cases, in which criminal groups impersonate the Taliban security forces. They search apartments, confiscate savings, valuables and property. The community is completely helpless in the scope of these attacks. Although, according to press reports, the Taliban detained a dozen or so people in Kabul and Herat in October, who impersonated officers acting on behalf of the current government, this did not completely eliminate the problem.

Since Afghanistan was taken over, there have been two major attacks on Shia mosques in Kunduz and Kandahar Provinces, as well as several smaller attacks on Taliban members in Kabul. The so-called Islamic State confirmed that it is responsible for the above-mentioned attacks.

In general, Kabul residents avoid moving around the city after dark or in deserted locations, because such behaviour is associated with the risk of becoming an accidental victim of robbery. If Kabul residents have to leave their home, they try not to take valuables with them, e.g. mobile phones, in order to minimise the possible losses.

### **1.4. Ethnic diversity**

Kabul is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Afghanistan. The available estimation data indicate that the dominant group are Tajiks (45 percent), who live in the northern boroughs of the city. Other major groups are Hazaras (25 percent), who live in the Hazarajat area bordering Kabul in the west, and the Pashtuns, who live in the south and who are considered to be the most politically influential group in Afghanistan. Moreover, Kabul is also inhabited by other ethnic minorities, such as Uzbeks, Turkmens, Hindu and Baloch

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people<sup>10</sup>. Non-Pashtun ethnic groups believe that available estimates are not up-to-date and that they do not represent the actual percentage of the Hazaras or Tajik community. The fact is that due to the ongoing conflict and numerous migrations, as well as the policy of Pashtun government, the last census was conducted in Afghanistan in the second half of the 1970s. Significant part of the population believes that the percentage of Pashtuns, which is based on the old census number, is currently overstated, and as a result Pashtuns receive greater share in the scope of governmental institutions and jobs. In Afghanistan, the number of government, university and military positions is allocated in accordance with the size of population of a given ethnic group.

Ethnicity does not affect the social or economic status of individual Kabul residents. However, both in the public sector and private sector, there is a tendency that persons holding higher positions hire and favour people from their ethnic groups. In particular, it can be observed in the sector of state administration.

On a daily basis, residents do not feel hostility or rivalry based on an ethnic origin. People interact with each other without conflicts, however free time is usually spent among persons from your own ethnic group. Furthermore, ethnically mixed marriages take place rarely, and if so, they usually happen between Pashtuns and Tajiks. Marriage with a person of Hazaras origin is considered to be a misalliance, therefore it occurs extremely rarely and only in the case of a Pashtun man or a Tajik man with a Hazaras woman. A man of Hazaras origin has no chance of marrying a Pashtun woman or a Tajik woman.

Dari language dominates in the Kabul streets and, next to Pashto, it is the second official language used in Afghanistan. It should be emphasised that not all Pashtuns in Afghanistan know and use their native language. This results from the prosaic fact that there is a smaller number of publications in Pashto language available on the market. Afghanistan is dominated by books and studies, which are in large numbers printed and published in neighbouring Iran in the Persian language – a dialect of the Dari language.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/kabul-population>

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### **1.5. Average standard of living**

As it was mentioned before, due to the fact that city's infrastructure is not adapted to such a large urban population, many Kabul residents live in informal housing estates. Most of these places are not equipped with septic tanks, therefore some part of the sewage flows into the gutter, and other part is collected in a designated place located next to the house, from where it is taken from time to time by appropriate employees. Each house is equipped with a water tank, which is usually placed on the roof and filled once a week with municipal water from pipes. Many large families have additionally supplied themselves with a well and a pump, because the amount of municipal water is not enough for them. The safest way to buy drinking water is in a store. Water from the well is not purified at all, therefore it is not suitable for consumption, while municipal water can be drunk only after boiling it. In order to build a well in Kabul, currently it is necessary to dig a hole to a depth of 90 metres. Water is located so deep due to very large number of Kabul residents.

Most people belonging to middle class in Kabul own at least one car. Despite the lack of access to running water and sewage system, the flats are fully equipped with household appliances and audio/video devices. During winter, the houses are heated by burning wood, coal or sawdust in a heating stove. Only one borough in Kabul – Makrujan is provided with municipal heating.

### **1.6. Living conditions of the poorest groups**

Until the fall of government led by Ashraf Ghani in mid-August 2021, the estimates indicated that more than a half of Afghanistann population lived below the poverty line. The latest analyses of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicate that this index may soon increase to 97 percent<sup>11</sup>. In its entire history, Afghanistann has never experienced such a deep economic and humanitarian crisis, as well as a complete inhibition of development, as right now due to the government's collapse. An almost two-month break in domestic and foreign trade, collapse of the entire state administration and complete freezing

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/97-percent-afghans-could-plunge-poverty-mid-2022-says-undp>

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of cash reserves in the banks had an impact on every area of all citizens' life. Furthermore, a very large number of Kabul residents were employed by the state administration, as well as foreign entities. A great number of private companies provided services or supplies to the international security assistance forces, which stationed in Afghanistan. As a result of withdrawal of the troops and fall of the government, the entire families lost their source of income overnight. Many people, who until now had average income, have fallen into poverty and into debt. Shortly after the fall of the government and due to the problem with liquidity of cash on the market, as well as the suspension of wages, a common way to get funds for food in the capital was selling goods from the house - from furniture, household appliances and audio/video devices, to small everyday items. Furthermore, the individual cases of selling children also occurred<sup>12</sup>.

It should be emphasised that not all of the poorest Kabul residents live in the slums on the city's outskirts. In every borough, including Wazir Akbar Khan that is considered as rich, there are poor areas, where people live in tents. Some part of very poor people live in the very centre of Kabul, e.g. in flats received from the state in the 1980s. These premises are in a very bad technical condition - there is moisture, fungus, often unsealed windows and doors, as well as patched roof. During winter, the poorest residents use old heating stoves, in which they burn harmful rubbish. Diet of the poor population is limited to potatoes, vegetables, bread and sweet tea. Rice is a more expensive product and it is not eaten often. Due to its price, meat is in principle completely excluded from the diet<sup>13</sup>. The United Nations World Food Programme has been operating in Kabul for many years, and it provides occasional food packages to the poorest. This constitutes a significant support for many families, however it is not sufficient and it does not eliminate the problem of malnutrition.

People living in the slums struggle with the lack of fundamental hygiene products. During winter, the temperature in makeshift houses or tents drops below zero. The living areas are small and diseases spread very quickly. People suffer from hunger and malnutrition. The common thing for the poorest is to collect food, which is taken outside by hotel employees.

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<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of October, there was a case of a woman who decided to sell her 1.5 year old baby for

30 000 afghani (about 400 USD);

<sup>13</sup> Average price of meat in Kabul amounts to 450 afghani (5 USD).



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There is no access to drinking water in the slums. Every once in a while a water cistern drives up and people who have some money can buy it.

Despite very hard conditions, particularly during autumn and winter season, the residents of the slums try to lead a normal social life.



A temporary camp for internally displaced persons in the Kheir Chane borough in Kabul.  
Private archive.

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### 1.7. Access to health service

The access to medical care services is better in Kabul compared to other provinces, however even the hospitals in the capital do not have the ability to carry out more complex tests. The vast majority of Kabul residents use state health service, because it is free. Nevertheless, there are several hospitals in the city financed by other countries and they are commonly referred to as e.g. French hospital, German hospital or Japanese hospital. Wealthy people use private medical care. Private hospitals have more modern medical equipment, better physicians and put greater emphasis on hygiene. If people can afford it, then they choose to seek treatment abroad, mainly in Pakistan and India. The hospitals for children constitute an exception. Kabul is a city with the greatest capabilities of inpatient treatment for the youngest. These hospitals are equipped with modern equipment obtained with the use of international funds.

Afghans use health services only if they have severe symptoms of the disease. Usually they treat themselves with the use of home remedies and traditional medicine. When home remedies do not help, then the patients get the advice of a pharmacist, who - among others - can insert a cannula and give injections. It is very common to take drips at home, even in the case of ordinary poisoning. A visit in the hospital is the last resort. Unfortunately, this often results in the fact that it is already too late to help a sick person. In Afghanistan, also in its capital, the prophylaxis is not common, which results from difficult access to health services and low public awareness.

Both public and state health services offer help in the case of emergencies. In Kabul, in *Shahr-e Naw*, there is one specialised hospital dedicated only to emergencies - mainly the victims of terrorist attacks. Other hospitals include the hospital emergency departments. There are long queues and visits are usually associated with waiting times amounting to several hours, unless there is a high risk of the loss of life after initial diagnosis - then the help is provided immediately.

The ambulances are mainly used to transport the injured victims of attacks or to transport sick people between the hospitals. Due to small quantity of ambulances and their low availability, as well as intensive traffic and traffic jams, in the case of emergencies the Kabul residents (e.g. when a patient exhibits symptoms of a stroke or heart attack) try to get

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to a hospital on their own. There is a good chance that they will get there faster compared to waiting for the medical transport.

The break in foreign trade, as well as the lack of financial liquidity, which were caused by the collapse of the government, had a negative impact on the sector of health services. Many facilities, particularly those located in rural areas, have been forced to stop providing medical services. Many qualified physicians left Afghanistan, while those who stayed have not been paid for several months. Hospitals and clinics are running out of or have already run out of medication for the sick people, as well as protective measures for employees and medical accessories. The Taliban's takeover resulted in the situation, in which approximately one in four hospitals dedicated to treating COVID-19 patients was closed<sup>14</sup>.

### **1.8. Access to medication**

Until 15 August 2021, both Kabul and the rest of the country did not have problems with access to medication. Pharmacies were well stocked and some of them operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Furthermore, medications were relatively cheap. The only problem was low quality of the offered medications, which affected their effectiveness. The fall of the government resulted in cash flow difficulties, closing of the borders, suspension of import and nationwide problems with supplies. The citizens found it very difficult to buy medications, because some of them were not available in any pharmacy in the city. Most medications sold in Afghan pharmacies originate from India and Pakistan. This results from the fact that medications from other countries are expensive and only a small part of the society could afford to buy them, therefore the entrepreneurs do not decide to import them. It is common in Afghanistan to bring medications from Europe, also as a gift. Due to the above-mentioned low quality of available pharmaceuticals and their ineffectiveness, the physicians more often and quicker decide to administer the antibiotics to the patients. In Afghanistan, all medications are available over-the-counter. The prescriptions function only as information concerning the prescribed medication and they are not required during purchase.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/22/world/asia/Afghanistann-covid-hospitals.html>

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### 1.9. Street children

In the context of children, Kabul is one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Labour law only in theory regulates the minimum age of employment for minors. In reality, child labour in the scope of children aged 5-14 is something common, regardless of gender. In the Bot Chak borough located in the eastern Kabul, which in most part is inhabited by Pashtuns, boys are sent to work as soon as they turn seven. Children work in a dangerous environment and they are exposed to injuries, accidents, as well as verbal and physical attacks. The children working in the street suffer from malnutrition, they do not have the possibility to acquire education or medical treatment, and many of them suffer from lung diseases due to continuous exposure to exhaust fumes and dust.

The most common jobs performed by minors include: retail sale of chewing gums or pens in the street, collecting rubbish, polishing shoes, working in sheet metal factories, jobs involving the burning of bricks, looking for customers for taxi drivers. There is no labour inspection in Afghanistan, which would protect minors on the labour market. Working children are invisible to the system, as well as to the majority of society.

Furthermore, minors work for the lowest wages. It is not uncommon for them to be the only persons providing for their families. In accordance with publicly available information, it was estimated that approximately one in four children was working before the pandemic. Due to the pandemic and collapse of the economy, every other family was forced to send at least one child to work. Currently, due to sudden increase in unemployment, even more children can be seen working in the streets of Kabul<sup>15</sup>.

The society's attitude towards street children is partly determined by social status. More affluent people usually find a moment to buy something from the minors or to help them in some other way. Nevertheless, most people in Kabul, particularly after the collapse of the government, struggle to support their own families. Many years of war result in the fact that society, which is preoccupied with its own economic problems, passes indifferently by the children working or begging in the street.

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<sup>15</sup> In October, the TOLO television station reported that unemployment had affected over half of the population.

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So far the government has not been able to eliminate the problem of child labour. Before the fall of the government, an enormous percentage of aid aimed at the poorest came from abroad. Furthermore, the private initiatives also have been implemented, e.g. paying children to attend school, so that they could quit their jobs and at the same time bring money to their families. However, these were isolated cases.

Moreover, it is also common for the mafia to hire children from the poorest families and to force them to beg for money in the streets. This also happens to infants, who are given preparations based on poppy seed, in order to make them sedated and sleepy.

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## 2. Freedom to run business activity and crime

The Afghan economy is highly dependent on the import of products. Among others, the country imports all types of fuel, basic food products, e.g. flour, oil, sugar, and medications. The sector of agriculture constitutes the main source of income and export for a quarter of the country's economy. Furthermore, it also has a significant impact on the livelihood of 80 percent of the population.

In Kabul, the services constitute the main engine of economy. This sector employs about 64 percent of available labour force. For the purposes of comparison - the manufacturing sector employs over 19 percent and agriculture less than 18 percent of the labour force<sup>16</sup>.

### 2.1. Bureaucracy

Establishment of your own business activity and its subsequent running in Afghanistan are associated with a long and complex bureaucratic process. Firstly, this results from the lack of electronic systems and electronic communication, which would facilitate and accelerate the flow of information. Secondly, it is caused by widespread corruption and bribery. For example, one of the conditions required for establishment of a business activity in certain cases is the submission of certificates (to the Ministry of Trade and Industry) from all 34 provinces in the country, confirming that you do not have any customs and tax arrears. Due to the fact that it is not possible to do it via e-mail, the interested person should go personally to the appropriate office in each province, in order to obtain such a document. It is a time-consuming process and generates costs associated with travel<sup>17</sup>. However, an employee of the ministry can issue such a certificate almost immediately, and takes a bribe of about 200 USD to do it. The situation is similar in the case of obtaining other documents. Therefore, duration of the process of establishing a business activity can vary from two days - in the case of paying bribes, to six months – if anyone would want to do everything in accordance with the

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<sup>16</sup> <https://awcci.af/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AWCCI-WNBA-Report-.pdf>, page 50.

<sup>17</sup> Travelling between the provinces is difficult due to mountains located in the central part of Afghanistan, as well as poorly developed road infrastructure and the lack of railway infrastructure.

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applicable regulations. Nevertheless, this does not mean that a new entrepreneur will save money by acting in accordance with the law. Travelling to all provinces alone will cost more than paying a bribe to the above-mentioned employee. Moreover, the entrepreneurs in Afghanistan are charged with additional fees at every opportunity. The state official responsible for issuing the permit for business activity or other certification may refuse to issue such document until he receives a bribe.

The business of selling various types of fuel is among the most desirable and most profitable types of economic activity. However, due to large profits that it generates, this type of business activity remains in the hands of high-ranking people. The most popular branches of business activity in Afghanistan include: production of various food, construction industry and goldsmith industry.

### **2.2. Ethnic origin in the context of the business activity type**

Due to the fact that taking care of formalities and permits requires knowing some people in the power structures, more profitable business activities are usually dominated by Pashtuns. Among others, it can be clearly observed in the case of black drug market, which is extremely profitable and big, or in the case of nut trade, which is characterised by a very large export market. In the case of small businesses, ethnicity does not matter, however some tendencies can be observed. Uzbeks usually operate in the business of weaving rugs. This type of business does not require logistics, specialised equipment or specific storage conditions. In rural areas inhabited by this ethnic group, where infrastructure is poorly developed, weaving rugs in your own home is a very popular activity. Hazaras dominate among the suppliers and helpers.

### **2.3. Difficulties in the scope of running a business activity**

Running your own business activity in Afghanistan is associated with many problems. There is an unhealthy competition on the market. People with connections in the government or parliament are trying to monopolise the market. New competitors struggle with inspections,

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which are sent specifically to impose high fees for obtaining a licence. A person who does not know the right people will not be able to compete with its own business activity.

Widespread corruption is also a big problem. In the case of import of the products into the country, paying bribes begins at the customs office when the goods cross the border, and ends when the goods are stored. There is even a very common phenomenon for the police employees to look for additional income by tracking entrepreneurs and creating problems, in order to get bribes for solving them. In summary, the success in business in Afghanistan is not possible without corruption. The residents often complain about tax offices and the need for too frequent settlements, which each time involve paying a bribe.

Those entrepreneurs who would like to enter a further foreign market struggle with difficulties of an institutional nature. Export of goods beyond the region is not possible due to the lack of a competent office in the country, which would issue quality certificates compliant with the standards applicable e.g. in the EU countries. The entrepreneurs looking for a sales market send their goods to India and Pakistan, where, after obtaining the appropriate licenses and certificates from local authorities, the same goods are sold in Europe at much higher prices as Pakistani or Indian goods. A serious obstacle that hinders the export of food products from the country is the lack of good cold stores for storage and refrigerated trucks for transportation. Due to the fact that Afghanistan does not have direct access to any port, the food traders are highly dependent on political situation and bilateral relations with Pakistan, through which the trade route to the Karachi port runs. Closing of the borders or reduction in their capacity causes enormous losses for Afghan food producers and sellers<sup>18</sup>. Another problem, which is faced in particular by food production entrepreneurs, consists of frequent power outages. Food without the possibility of proper heat treatment or appropriate storage deteriorates very quickly. The use of electricity generators increases production prices, particularly in the case of increase in the price per litre of gasoline. This translates into an increase in the selling price and results in a reduction in the number of customers.

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<sup>18</sup> Infrastructure is very significant in the context of trade. Most of the country's foreign trade is mainly transported through the following border crossings: Herat (Iran), Jalalabad (Pakistan), Aghina (Turkmenistan) and Mazar-e-Sharif (Uzbekistan). These border crossings account for nearly two-thirds of Afghanistan's entire foreign trade.



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The problems affecting e.g. entrepreneurs running animal farms, include the lack of veterinary specialists and good-quality medications. In the case of a disease of one animal, it often happens that failure to undertake proper corrective and preventive measures leads to the pestilence of all animals in the farm and bankruptcy of the owner.

### **2.4. Violence and kidnappings for ransom**

Kidnapping businessmen for ransom constitutes a very difficult problem, which both the former and present authorities seem to be helpless in dealing with. During last three years, the local mafia groups have been responsible for a series of kidnappings. Afghan television station reported that according to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce the country registered 100 cases of kidnappings in 2021. Ten of the abducted entrepreneurs died. In March 2021, a Kabul businessman spent 43 days in captivity and he was released only after his family borrowed 60 000 USD for ransom. Due to a series of kidnappings, about 400 entrepreneurs decided to move to Turkey. After the Taliban took power, common crime, including kidnappings and armed robbery, ceased to occur for a short period of time. Unfortunately, it grew again very quickly. Kidnappings of the entrepreneurs occur all the time. On 17 September 2021, unknown perpetrators left the body of an entrepreneur, who was kidnapped 17 days earlier, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul<sup>19</sup>. Afghanistan is characterised by such a high risk of violence and kidnappings by competitors and the mafia that most business owners choose to permanently send their families abroad. According to the Afghan media, 40 entrepreneurs have been kidnapped within two months from the collapse of the government. The kidnappings occurred in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kunduz and Balkh<sup>20</sup>. Many of these abductees died. According to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the cause for such a high number of kidnappings is the fact that after the Taliban took power, the gun ban was introduced. The entrepreneurs were deprived of the possibility to defend themselves, and therefore they became easy targets for kidnappings. At the end of October 2021, the

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<sup>19</sup> <https://tolonews.com/index.php/fa/Afghanistann-174721>

<sup>20</sup> <https://tolonews.com/Afghanistann-175208>

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Afghan Ministry of the Interior announced that it intends to start the process of issuing new gun licences to all entrepreneurs who are interested in this matter.

The new government informs that it is making every effort to prosecute the criminals. The Taliban allegedly detained 80 people in connection with murders and assaults by mid-October. Furthermore, a dozen or so people impersonating the Taliban in order to steal were detained in Kabul and Herat. The most vulnerable to robberies are entrepreneurs running small stores, where they keep their daily income. Some of them, particularly those who own stores in less frequented places, decide to shorten the opening hours due to fear of an attack after dark.

The Kabul residents unanimously condemn all acts of violence and appeal to the new authorities to ensure order and security. At the same time, they indicate a high level of unemployment as the reason for this new increase in crime.

### **2.5. Situation of entrepreneurs after 15 August**

The fall of the government resulted in a number of negative implications for big as well as small businesses. After the Taliban took power, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund entirely suspended their financial support for Afghanistan. Many investments and works have been stopped, among others in construction, railways and agriculture. Furthermore, many companies and entrepreneurs involved in these projects were overnight left without financial support. At the beginning of October 2021, the owners and representatives of about 120 construction companies protested outside the United Nations office in Kabul, demanding the payment of outstanding remuneration from the World Bank. The protesters emphasised that they have agreements signed with the World Bank and worked on the implementation of projects, however they did not receive due remuneration.<sup>21</sup>

Even prior to the fall of the Ashraf Ghani's government, the Afghan economy highly depended on the international aid. Foreign grants were completely suspended after the Taliban took power in the country, due to the fear of financing the Taliban. Freezing of the accounts resulted in the fact that the country started to run out of cash. Enormous queues of Afghans

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<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/tolonews/status/1453620184720289797>

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wanting to pay out their savings were lining up in front of the banks. The protests and riots occurred, particularly in Kabul, which has the biggest number of bank branches in the entire country.

The banks had no access to cash, so they introduced limits on withdrawals. Depending on a bank, it was possible to withdraw only 200 USD or 400 USD per week. Moreover, in order to keep as much cash in the country as possible, high commissions were imposed in the case of international transfers of money<sup>22</sup>.

The entrepreneurs and other citizens lost their trust in banking institutions, which denied them access to money during the above-mentioned crisis. In result, the entrepreneurs have no funds to pay for products imported into the country or to pay their suppliers. Afghanistan is running out of products, so the prices have increased. Moreover, the prices for gasoline and gas have also increased. At the beginning of November 2021, the prices were: 90 afghani for one litre of gas (1 USD) and 76 afghani for 1 litre of gasoline (0.84 USD)<sup>23</sup>.

The import of goods to Afghanistan was implemented with the use of dollars, hence high dependence of the Afghan economy on this currency<sup>24</sup>. Due to the lack of an institution printing the Afghan currency in the country, it is not possible to introduce the missing amount into the market<sup>25</sup>.

The collapse of the government resulted (among others) in the fact that Afghan entrepreneurs are not able to participate in the EXPO trade fair in Dubai, which is held from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The Afghan government did not pay the remaining 3 out of 7 million dirhams necessary to build the stand on time. Thus, the Afghan entrepreneurs have been deprived of the possibility to establish trade contacts and to find a sales market for exported goods, e.g. agricultural products, dried fruit and handicraft. Participation in the above-mentioned trade fair could constitute an opportunity for many people to balance the economic effects of the drought and to earn cash before the upcoming winter.

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<sup>22</sup> In the case of a transfer of 100 000 USD abroad, the commission amounted to 4 000 USD.

<sup>23</sup> Prices per litre prior to 15 August: gas 55-60 afghani (0.64 USD), gasoline 45-53 afghani (0.56 USD).

<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of November 2021, dollar exchange rate amounted to 90 afghani. For the purposes of comparison: in July of the same year it amounted to 79.50 afghani.

<sup>25</sup> Afghan currency has always been printed outside the country. In 2020, Poland won a tender to print 10 billion afghani (approx. 111 million USD), however due to the fall of the government, cooperation in this scope was completely stopped.

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Closure of passport offices, other state offices and diplomatic facilities made it impossible for entrepreneurs to make the planned business trips. The situation of Afghan businessmen is made even more difficult by the closure of borders. The greatest impact had the closure of border crossings with Pakistan (Torkham and Spin Boldak) - the biggest recipient of domestic export. The closure of borders was carried out during the harvest period and high season for the fruits, which were spoiled while waiting for the transport, and in result caused enormous losses.

The economic crisis has hit almost every sector of trade. The sellers of wood, despite decrease in the prices of goods compared to previous years, do not have customers this year. Most residents find it hard to get enough money to buy food, so the purchase of wood for the winter is not a priority for them. This, in turn, affects the wood traders and many of them borrow money or they are forced to close down their businesses. Goldsmiths and jewellery traders face a similar situation despite the fact that the price of gold on the market increased. Instead of buying jewellery, people sell their gold to get cash.

Moreover, closure of the airport and the lack of flights had negative impact on the export of Afghan rugs. Despite the fact that their prices decreased significantly, the domestic market was also down. For the rugs that have been already sold abroad, the sellers do not actually receive any money due to problems with transfers and withdrawals. Afghanistan exports rugs with an average value of approximately 1 billion USD per year<sup>26</sup>.

Due to fights between the Taliban and Afghan national forces, which occurred prior to the fall of the government, the entrepreneurs were affected by a massive loss of employees. Many employees left their jobs and moved to safer locations. Some of them managed to leave the country before closure of the borders. It should be emphasised that there is no minimum wage for private employees in Afghanistan. A company may recruit an employee by offering any remuneration for which a given employee agrees to work. Furthermore, there is also a shortage of customers on the market, because many people have left the country and the remaining population is in a very difficult financial situation. The scale of services in the country also significantly decreased. Despite the price reductions, e.g. in restaurants or

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<sup>26</sup> <https://tolonews.com/fa/business-174912>

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hairdressing salons, there are no customers. According to the estimates, income of the owners of small service businesses decreased by as much as 90 percent.

### **2.6. Women in business**

Afghanistan has an institution called the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), which is very committed to supporting the participation of Afghan women in the national economic development. It carries out trainings, draws up analyses, provides legal assistance and fights against gender discrimination on the labour market<sup>27</sup>.

During the last five years, there has been a significant increase in the quantity of companies run by women. The activities of such enterprises focused on the clothing industry, handicraft, food production and education. The main source of capital consisted of women's personal savings. Women ran their own restaurants and manufactured clothing under their own brand. Some companies employed as much as several hundred people. It should be emphasised that three quarters of the employees employed by female business owners were other women. The problems faced by Afghan businesswomen in Kabul included difficulties in the scope of access to government services and information, which partly resulted from the low representation of women in the government. Due to the lack of support and appropriate contacts, female business owners had very little chance of signing the government contracts. Furthermore, the participation of women in international trade fairs was also a big challenge. It was much harder for women to get a visa. Usually women had to be accompanied by a male family member, which generated additional travel costs. Women did not sell online and did not have a proper training in this scope. Due to safety reasons, many women had limited possibilities in the scope of mobility, which made it difficult for them to conduct their everyday work duties.

Many women decided to shut down their businesses after the fall of the government and in the run-up to it, out of fear of the Taliban. Furthermore, many of them left the country. The progress they have made in recent years has been inhibited or even regressed.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://awcci.af/en/>

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Immediately after taking control of the country, the Taliban ordered the women to stay at home and not go to work, until the situation in the country calmed down. At that time, the newly formed government had not staffed any women in its management and dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Moreover, it should be expected that further restrictions will emerge over time, which will expose Afghan women to marginalisation and exclusion. Due to many years of war and the resulting casualties, many women in Afghanistan are widows and the only providers for their families. By ordering them to stay at home, the Taliban destroys their professional achievements, as well as deprives them of their business activities and livelihoods, in result condemning many of them and their families to life in poverty.

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### **3. Women and men in Kabul - tradition and changes**

#### **3.1. Position and role of women in Afghanistann prior to the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani’s government**

Afghan women have always been marginalised because of their gender. In a multi-ethnic and traditional society, they fulfilled subordinate roles in regard to men. Although in the history of Afghanistann, there have been attempts to introduce reforms aimed at improving the situation of women<sup>28</sup>, they failed due to conservative society, in which tribal principles play a strong role. During the Taliban reign in the 1990s, women were not allowed to work, study or leave their house without the consent and company of a male family member. Moreover, it was required for women to wear burqas - outfits covering their silhouette and face. Women were not allowed to see a male physician, while female physicians were forced to stay at home and stop their medical practices. This resulted in a situation, in which women were in reality completely deprived of the possibility to get medical treatment. The breakthrough in this regard took place in 2001, along with the intervention of international forces. Since then, there has been a gradual improvement not only in the scope of safety, but also in the situation of women. A series of documents were drawn up in order to introduce reforms aimed at increasing the women's rights, including the National Strategy for the Development of Afghanistann and the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistann (NAPWA)<sup>29</sup>. The most significant changes concerned the improvement of women’s position in the legal and political sphere. Due to the introduced changes, women could participate in national elections and hold positions in the state administration. Also, the parities were established in the

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<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of 1920s, during the reign of King Habibullah and his successor - King Amanullah, some attempts were made to introduce reforms in the scope of abolition of polygamy, promotion of girls' education, allowing women to go out without a head covering and their right to inheritance. Subsequent attempts, mainly aimed at increasing the girls' access to education, were made at the beginning of 1980s. Unfortunately, the 1990s and emergence of the Taliban thwarted any progress in this scope.

<sup>29</sup> <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg149120.pdf>

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Parliament<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women's Affairs<sup>31</sup> was established, which however is currently inactive. Women held positions in the government, fulfilled the functions of ambassadors in diplomatic facilities, hosted their own radio and TV shows, as well as actively participated in the programmes concerning the development processes.

However, the above-mentioned changes were in reality felt primarily by the elites and women living in the larger cities. In the rural areas, the situation did not change significantly. In some families, women still require the permission of a male family member to vote (moreover, they vote in accordance with the decision of male family members - often the main reason for that is the illiteracy of women), work or study (among others).

The judiciary and justice system are the fields, which, despite many changes, remained mainly in the sphere of men. There were no women at the executive level in the supreme court, which directly translated into their weaker position and legal status in civil, as well as criminal cases. The Afghan Jirga<sup>32</sup> also still remains beyond the reach of women in rural areas, where - as a form of traditional institution - it plays a very important role in resolving disputes and problems of local communities. Moreover, its conservative guidelines often contradict the provisions of the constitution and even the provisions of criminal or civil law. Despite the fact that art. 22 of the Constitution signed on 16 January 2004, ratified on 26 January, section 2 on equality, states that "the citizens of Afghanistan - both men and women - have equal rights and obligations in the eyes of the law", the lives of Afghan women are still more affected by a mixture of common law, Islamic law and cultural traditions, which are not conducive to equality.

### **3.2. Situation of women after 15 August**

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<sup>30</sup> In the scope of Meshrano Jirga (senate), 17 out of 102 seats are reserved for women, while in the scope of Wolesi Jirga (parliament), 68 out of 250 seats are intended for women, which means that until 15 August 2021 Afghanistan had one of the highest rates of female participation in parliament in the region.

<sup>31</sup> <https://mowa.gov.af/dr> - website active on 02.11.2021, the ministry under the name unchanged by the Taliban.

<sup>32</sup> Jirga - a type of assembly that usually gathers older men, who are characterised by a certain authority, which can resolve disputes and decide on matters important to the local community; women's rights advocates criticise this type of traditional decision-making due to gender discrimination (among others).



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Despite many assurances of the international community during the Doha peace negotiations that the rights of women will not be restricted, after seizing the power in the country, the Taliban imposed a series of restrictions affecting the female part of the society. The biggest objection was raised in mid-September 2021, when the previous name of the Ministry of Women's Affairs was changed to the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. At the same time, all women working outside the health sector or studying were ordered to stay at home. Radio and TV stations run by women were shut down overnight. As the reasons for the decisions made in this regard, the Taliban indicated the uncertain security situation in the country, as well as the need to adjust the places of work and study to the principles of sharia law, which were not precisely defined by the new authorities.

Despite earlier declarations that women will be allowed to participate in the government administration, the Taliban did not include them in the political cabinet announced at the beginning of September. All women who previously fulfilled senior positions in the government must remain at home until further notice. Along with the restriction of women's right to work, the Taliban also deprived them of any possibility to earn money. Very often, particularly in Kabul, women were the only providers for their families or made a significant financial contribution to the livelihood of their family.

At the beginning of September, the removal of women from the government, as well as changing the name of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, resulted in the protests of women in Kabul. In the course of above-mentioned demonstrations, the Taliban attacked women verbally as well as physically, and violence was also used against journalists who were present there. Immediately after this event, the new government issued a total ban on demonstrations organised without the government's consent. The continuing lack of consent for women to return to work and school resulted in the fact that, despite this new regulation, there were several other protests organised in Kabul by the beginning of November 2021, however on a much smaller scale.

### **3.3. Role of a woman and a man in the family**

As mentioned many times before, Kabul is one of the most ethnically, economically and socially diverse cities in Afghanistan. There are relatively few native residents of the capital,

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because most of its population consists of displaced rural communities who came to the capital from various regions of the country, due to military actions, drought or unemployment. For this reason, the traditional division of roles may differ in individual families. Compared for example to Tajiks or Hazaras, Pashtuns are known for their more conservative approach to the role of women. Moreover, to a large degree it also depends on the economic status of a given family and the level of education of its members. However, in principle, men are responsible for the economic status in a traditional Afghan family, and they often provide for the entire household on their own. As a result, this often means earning enough money to support yourself, your wife, children, living parents or in-laws, as well as unmarried sisters. All male family members, who are able to work, should help in earning money for the family. Furthermore, it is also important to take care of the family's honour and to discipline/subordinate any inappropriate behaviour.

In the scope of a traditional Afghan family, women are mainly responsible for housework, cooking, raising children, receiving guests and meeting the needs of the household members. Moreover, a significant role of a woman, which affects the perception of the entire family, is to receive guests in as cordial and generous manner as a given household can afford. In addition, a woman is also responsible for rational portioning of the food.

Nowadays, only a small fraction of Afghans, who live in large cities such as Kabul, are characterised by more liberal approach to the role of women in society, as well as the function women play in the family. For example, such households exhibit a participatory decision-making process, in which all family members, including women, are involved. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Kabul is a city to which people came from various parts of Afghanistan, including southern provinces, e.g. Kandahar, Chost, Paktia, Paktika. These areas are characterised by tribal values, norms, as well as traditional laws, according to which men are the only decision makers, even in the educated families.

In accordance with the Afghan tradition, women are not expected to be financially independent or to have employment, but they can count on the support of their husbands, fathers or brothers. This constitutes one of the reasons why the right of inheritance allows women to get only half of what a man gets. Nevertheless, the reality took precedence over tradition and some women were forced to step out of their assigned role. Due to the conflict, which has lasted more than four decades, many women, who have become widows or whose

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husbands are unable to work, had to become the sole providers for the family and enjoy the same respect as men. The capital is able to offer greater employment opportunities for women, therefore there are many families in Kabul, in which a woman has taken over the traditional role of a man and is responsible for the livelihood of the entire family. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she has abandoned her domestic and family responsibilities.

#### **3.4. Situation of unmarried women, widows and divorced women**

The number of widows, particularly those of the members of Afghan security forces, has increased significantly as a result of the conflict that has lasted in the country for over 40 years. Majority of Afghan widows constitute one of the most vulnerable groups, and they usually suffer extreme poverty along with their children. These women are usually illiterate, they do not have documents and perform the simplest services every day. Sometimes they are forced to beg for money, in order to somehow feed their children. Moreover, after the collapse of the government many of these women ended up on the streets. After death of her husband, in some cases the woman leaves her children with the family of the deceased husband and returns to her parents' home. If she is young enough, the woman sometimes gets married again. In conservative families, the relatives of the deceased husband feel obliged to take care of his wife, so it sometimes happens that a widow marries her deceased husband's brother, even if he already had a wife. It is common in the Pashtun community that the widow is usually married to her deceased husband's brother, regardless of the age difference that separates them. Sometimes it happens that a man is older than a woman, however there are also situations, in which even a teenage boy marries his older sister-in-law. It should be emphasised that the parties are not always forced to do it. Such situation is often perceived by widows as a kind of relief, because it is associated with economic security for her and her children. This is mainly applicable to the traditional families, in which women are not educated and do not have a job.

Only in the case of families characterised by a higher economic status (and there are not many of those in Afghanistan), the situation of a widow does not differ from the situation of other family members. The situation of widows in Kabul is better compared to widows in

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rural areas, and the women with better education will find a job and, while taking over the traditional role of a man, they will become the providers for the family.

In Afghanistan, there is a specific group of women without husbands, who are called *zende biwe*, i.e. widows of living husbands. This term is used to describe women whose husbands live permanently abroad, and they often wait years for international protection or other form of legalisation of their stay. The wives of such men live in constant expectation, uncertainty and loneliness. Apart from the problems of everyday life in a conflict-torn country, these women have to deal with external pressure and have to answer uncomfortable questions from their family and friends. Some of these women live with in-laws, with whom the relations are not always great. Moreover, many of these women suffer from depression.

It should be emphasised that in the culture of Afghanistan there is no concept of a single woman in the European meaning. The households are often big and multi-generational. Adult unmarried children usually live in the family home of their parents or in-laws for their entire lives. The Afghan nuclear families are characterised by very strong family ties and there is also a great collective sense of responsibility for mutual welfare and prosperity. An unmarried daughter or sister will always live with her parents or siblings. However, getting married, having a husband and children constitute very important aspects in the lives of most women, including those who are educated and have active professional life. As a result, unmarried women sometimes feel pressure that can lead to low self-esteem and even depression.

Divorces occur rarely in Afghanistan, even in big cities such as Kabul. There is even a saying in the Afghan culture: 'After a woman left the family home in a white robe, she can only return to it in a white robe' (meaning in a shroud). Divorced women struggle with social stigma and exclusion. Furthermore, they may have problems with renting an apartment or getting a job. Women are aware of their situation and usually agree to a less happy life in exchange for economic security and avoiding exclusion. Moreover, a man also rarely decides to get a divorce – more often he decides to live in polygamy.

### **3.5. Women in the city space**

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Women in Kabul were as much present in public spaces as men until 15 August 2021. They could freely go shopping, walk, deal with their errands in the offices, go to cafes, and move around the city in a relatively free manner. They were professionally active and visible in many workplaces. Moreover, they managed restaurants, owned stores, ran law firms and medical practices.

Harassment against women, e.g. sexual harassment, happens all the time, particularly in crowded places, such as marketplaces. The extent to which women took advantage of the possibility to work or carry out other activities, prior to the Taliban takeover, was very individual and varied considerably. Some native female Kabul residents from liberal families were uncomfortable moving around the city outside their standard route to work and home, and they moved around the city accompanied by a male family member, child or elderly woman. They were mainly middle-aged women, whose times of youth occurred during the Civil War and the Taliban reign in the 1990s. Representatives of the young generation participated in the social life of Kabul in large numbers and in a comfortable free manner.

Women take full advantage of urban transport, including special minibuses intended only for women. Prior to the collapse of the government, female public officials or women holding senior positions in private institutions were provided with special transport.

After the Taliban took control over the country, women completely disappeared from public space for a while. The new government prohibited them from working and studying – the girls studying in grades one to six were the exception. During the first days of new government, women were afraid to move alone, without a male companion. They chose their outfits more carefully, in order to avoid endangering themselves to the guards who kept order. However, women reappeared on the streets over time. Despite the lack of possibility to work and study, they are still visible in the public space in Kabul. From the beginning of November 2021, the Taliban gave consent for the return to work of women employed in the medical sector, in the passport office and at the airport<sup>33</sup>.

### **3.6. Access to education**

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<sup>33</sup> The Passport Office in Kabul was the first state institution, in which the new government allowed women to return to work when it reopened.

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According to the data published by the Ministry of Education prior to 15 August 2021, Kabul girls constituted 40 percent of the 1.5 million students in total, so a relatively high number compared to 17 percent of girls from rural areas. Economic status of the family and ethnic origin do not matter during selection of an educational institution. Until 15 August 2021, most schools in Kabul had gender segregation implemented from the first grade. However, some schools – primarily due to logistical reasons and insufficient teaching staff - had unisex classes until the sixth grade. From the seventh grade, boys and girls have always studied separately. In the schools intended for girls, the majority of teachers, administrative staff and management staff, with few exceptions, were women. The basic curriculum for girls and boys was the same. The Ministry of Education created one school curriculum, which was implemented in the same manner throughout the country.

After the collapse of the government in mid-August, all schools were immediately closed. Only girls attending grades one to six were allowed to study. The rest of them were forced to stay at home and wait for the decision of the new government regarding further education possibilities for girls. In October, the Balkh Province was the first one to allow girls to attend school up to the twelfth grade. The authorities in the Kunduz Province and Saripol Province made similar decisions.

These restrictions also had an impact on universities. Until the collapse of the government, the following fields of study were most preferred by young women in Kabul: journalism, law and political sciences, literature, medicine and accounting. However, the state universities have been completely closed after the Taliban took over the country. The new government officially informs that the works are carried out with the objective of implementation of the sharia law principles, and that the state universities will reopen in 2021/22 or in 2022/23 academic year.

The situation of private universities is different and they remain open also to women. However, the female students must obey the rules of appropriate outfit (abaya and niqab), and they are forced to use separate entrances and exits, which are intended only for women. Moreover, in the classroom, women should be additionally separated from male students with a curtain and they should leave five minutes before the end of the classes. Furthermore, women are allowed to attend only the classes run by other women or older men.

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Due to restrictions associated with the dress code, many female students decided not to continue their studies. Many women are also afraid to travel to universities and they are concerned about the checkpoints, where the Taliban searches computers and telephones. A number of young women have lost their motivation to continue education - they see no sense to invest in the education in a situation, in which future employment possibilities are uncertain.

### **3.7. Access of women to the labour market**

Kabul was the city with the highest percentage of working women until the collapse of the government. The capital provided jobs in the government, where democratic laws and mechanisms aimed at countering gender discrimination were implemented. Officially the country had a career development system based on professional achievements, as well as policy of the so-called positive discrimination. All citizens, regardless of gender or ethnic origin, could participate in the recruitments for various jobs and take up employment. However, a big problem that inhibited the access of women to jobs in the state administration, particularly in the scope of senior positions, was the widespread corruption and the presence of fundamentalists in government structures.

Nevertheless, the international community, which has been present in the country since 2001, put emphasis on the professional activation of women and the issues of equality, which directly translated into the number of women employed by these institutions. Therefore, women had a good chance of finding a well-paid job in Kabul during this period, among others in the delegations at the United Nations Office or in the offices of non-governmental organisations. Thanks to the above-mentioned policy, the economic status of many households, in which women provided for or helped financially support their families, improved in a significant manner.

However, despite a very good salary, prestige and development possibilities, the employment by foreign entities was associated with the risk of an attack by the rebels.

It is necessary to emphasise that women working in a gender-mixed environment are negatively perceived by certain families. The society has less trust for them in the moral sphere, which in result limits their chances of finding a husband. Such professions include (among others): jobs associated with art (singing, painting), jobs in private or international

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companies. Despite these issues, women were very active in the labour market (also in the private sector) until 15 August 2021. Afghan women were the owners of stores and cafes, they worked in libraries and universities, and their presence in the workplaces was extensive.

Until the collapse of the government, women preferred to chose the profession of a teacher and a physician, which enjoy high social respect and recognition. Many women from more liberal families decided to work in the media - as reporters or entertainment presenters. However, due to the increase (during the last two years) in conducted attacks targeting media representatives, many women gave up this profession due to fear for their own safety.

There is no doubt that the most dangerous job for women was work in the structures of the Afghan National Security Forces. It is necessary to emphasise that this resulted not only from the natural risk of attack posed by work in the police or the army, but also due to cases of sexual abuse. The lack of prevention and protection mechanisms for women, among others against harassment in the workplace, as well as the male environment and the patriarchal community, constituted real obstacles to the safe performance of work and the pursuit of rights by women.

Women's ability to work outside their house has always been severely restricted by cultural issues, safety concerns and limited transport options. Nevertheless, the high level of unemployment, exacerbated by the pandemic, benefited women in this scope, because their families, while being on the verge of poverty, had no other choice than to consent to their professional activity.

Prior to 15 August 2021, women had free access to the labour market in Kabul, however the fact whether they got a job and in what field, depended on the degree of conservatism, education, as well as the willingness of the woman herself, or the needs of a given family. It is necessary to emphasise that due to the great diversification of community, there are many women in Kabul who live in families with extremely traditional views, and in such families the father or older brother (or husband after marriage) decides whether women can work.

After the Taliban took power in the country, women stopped working overnight, and similarly to many other people in the country, they did not receive outstanding remuneration. Many educated women having many years of experience were forced to stay at home until further notice.



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### 3.8. Childcare

In accordance with the Afghan labour code, all women working in the public as well as private sector are entitled to 90 days of paid maternity leave. A woman is entitled to thirty days before giving birth, and to the remaining 60 days after giving birth. If there is something wrong with the birth or if the woman gives birth to more than one child, then she is entitled to 15 days of additional leave. There is no statutory paternity leave in Afghanistan. Apart from the lunch break, nursing mothers are entitled to an additional time for breastfeeding at the workplace, amounting to no less than 30 minutes every three hours. Furthermore, the employer may not send a pregnant woman or mother with a child under two years of age on a business trip, or order her to work overtime, without the consent of such woman. Reduction of salary or firing a woman in the above-mentioned situation will also constitute a violation of the rules of the Labour Code<sup>34</sup>. In reality, the degree of compliance with the labour law in the state administration was higher compared to the private sector.

If a woman who recently gave birth lives at home with her mother, mother-in-law, unmarried sister or sister-in-law, then one of these women will take care of the baby. It is often the case in the state workplaces that a woman, after using her maternity leave, comes to work only once in a while to sign the attendance list. The society is characterised by a high tolerance towards women with young children, as well as solidarity with them.

A nursery is the solution in the case of families, in which a woman returns to work after giving birth to a child, but there is no one at home who could take care of the baby. Kabul has state nurseries, private nurseries and the so-called governmental nurseries, which are intended for the children of female employees of the administrative sector. The last type constitutes a very convenient solution, because such nursery is located in the workplace or next to it, so the mother can come and feed the child when it is necessary. The nurseries accept children from the age of three months to three years. Subsequently, children attend kindergartens until the age of five.

There is no form of paid childcare by unrelated qualified persons in Afghanistan, i.e. by babysitters and nannies.

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<sup>34</sup> Full text of the labour code: <https://moci.gov.af/sites/default/files/2021-05/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1.pdf>

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### 3.9. Engagement and marriage

Forced marriages rarely occur in Kabul. More and more often the family asks the daughter for consent and gives her a choice. The position of daughters in the family gradually increases in Kabul, and they are more and more appreciated by fathers and brothers. Among others, this results from the fact that they work and help support the family. Forced marriages usually happen among traditional-minded migrants. However, the pandemic contributed to an increase in the number of forced marriages, as well as marriages of girls under the age of 18. It should be expected that the economic crisis caused by the fall of the government will result in a subsequent increase in forced marriages, which will fulfil the role of an agreement intended to bring financial benefits to the family of bride. This will be mainly applicable to the migrants and people in difficult financial situation.

In the scope of traditional Afghan and Muslim culture, marriage is considered to be an essential part of life. It is assumed as natural and recommended that all relationships between a man and a woman lead to marriage. Officially, dating in the meaning of Western world does not occur. In more liberal families, there are meetings organised for couples that are supposed to get married, however such meetings take place after the official engagement and usually in the company of a family member - it may be younger sibling. Nevertheless, the young people were unofficially dating before the fall of the government. Such meetings usually took place in cafes and restaurants, in the areas intended for families. The girls usually perceived those meetings as the first contact with a possible future husband, while the boys treated them as much less binding. However, these types of meetings no longer take place since the Taliban took power.

Love marriages happen more and more often in Kabul, and it can be assumed that they constitute about half of all marriages. Many young people meet at university and they fall in love there. In such case, the boy's family visits the girl's family and asks for her hand. This type of visit is called *chastegari* and it usually occurs several times. It is not perceived as appropriate to give the girl's hand too quickly, therefore it sometimes happens that the boy's family comes repeatedly to ask for her hand, even up to a year or two years. When the girl's family finally agrees to give her hand to a specific candidate, then they give the future groom's family a tray of sweets as a symbol of their acceptance. This gesture is called *szirin dadan*. In such situation, the fiancée usually organises a party at home or in a hotel, provides meals for

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the guests and gives the future wife some gifts (e.g. clothes, jewellery). Wedding is the subsequent step, during which the mullah performs a civil marriage, the so-called *nika*. Then, the amount of *mehrije* is determined during the wedding night, i.e. financial or material guarantee provided to a woman in the case of a divorce. It is assumed that after marriage a woman moves into her husband's family. Due to the difficult economic situation in the country, the couples rarely move to their own home. A week after the wedding, the bride's family provides furnishings for the new home, i.e. dowry.

In the case of arranged marriages, the entire process is the same. Even nowadays many young people in Afghanistan agree to this type of marriage. This results from the trust in their parents and faith in the right choice they make, as well as the respect that should not be violated by disobedience.

Nowadays, the young lovers do not run away anymore, particularly in the capital of the country.

### **3.10. Honour killings and setting on fire**

In general, the honour killings do not happen in Kabul. Nevertheless, individual Afghan families, who observe a certain set of traditional values no matter where they live, will perceive honour killings as a method of solving the problem and clearing up the family name. The fact that this view is very deeply rooted in the mentality of some families can be evidenced by the cases of honour killings occurring among the Afghan diaspora living permanently abroad. In the case of unmarried women suspected of extramarital relations or caught red-handed, the family usually uses physical violence as punishment, and then forces the couple to marry. However, it more and more often happens that the anger also affects a man. There have been cases in Kabul of shooting or pouring acid on a man, and not a woman.

Physical violence against women is still a taboo in Afghanistan. Police's failure and reluctance to arrest suspects, as well as the lack of progress in cases, constitute the most common reasons for not reporting such crimes. Moreover, a significant reason is also shame, as well as traditional issue of keeping all family disputes and problems only in the circle of relatives, and solving such disputes among them. Although the number of convictions for the murders of women has increased in the country, this does not apply to the so-called "honour

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killings" by family members. In 2018, an important change was made to the criminal code and the protection of honour is no longer a mitigating factor in the murder cases. Nevertheless, such view is deeply rooted in certain parts of society, in particular among Pashtuns. The statistics indicate that only about a third of honour killing cases are prosecuted, and less than 25 percent of the perpetrators are convicted<sup>35</sup>. The vast majority of cases are never investigated, because the police does not apprehend the perpetrators and it does not hand over the cases to prosecutors. Moreover, it is common for the families, who fear judgement, to claim that the woman took her own life.

#### **3.11. Access of women to health service, obstetrics**

The use of medical services by female Kabul residents mainly comes down to obstetrics. Until the fall of the government in mid-August 2021, there was a sufficient number of female physicians in the obstetrics and gynaecology department, however the internal medicine department and other departments were dominated by male physicians. The mortality rate of mothers giving birth and infants is still high. Maternity hospitals are overcrowded, there is not enough equipment, and physicians deliver several hundred babies per day. Due to power outages, there are some cases, when natural and surgical births are received under the light of mobile phones' flashlights. Moreover, there is not enough medical equipment, as well as insufficient amount of diagnostic tests, which would detect defects of the foetus or genetic abnormalities. Another problem is low awareness of women in the scope of the conduct of pregnancy, tests, as well as a certain percentage of illiteracy. The young age at which women get married and early motherhood prevent them from getting education and starting professional work. This translates into a small number of female physicians.

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<sup>35</sup> [Implementing Afghanistan's Elimination of Violence against Women Law | HRW](#)

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## **4. Internal migrants and displaced persons, repatriates – perspectives for the integration**

Afghanistan is characterised by one of the highest rates of internally displaced persons in the world<sup>36</sup>. Despite the fact that internal migrations of people are not a new phenomenon - they have always occurred due to the seasonal movement of nomadic populations - the consequences of the current conflict-induced integral migrations of people are felt throughout the country, particularly in large cities such as Kabul.

### **4.1. Internal migrants**

The latest estimates indicate that Afghanistan had 570 000 internally displaced persons due to the conflict, just from January to September 2021<sup>37</sup>. Most displacements occurred from May to July, i.e. during the time when international troops were withdrawing and the Taliban offensive was progressing. Afghans left their places of residence due to fighting and growing uncertainty regarding the future situation in the areas taken over by anti-government forces, and they moved to cities, including to Kabul, which was the longest-held government area and which was perceived as safe.

After the fall of the government and cessation of the fighting in mid-August 2021, some part of population began to return to their original places of residence. Unfortunately, many houses and farms have been partially or completely destroyed, which makes it impossible for some to return. It is estimated that due to negative situation in terms of safety, the number of internally displaced persons will reach 750 000 by the end of 2021<sup>38</sup>. The vast majority of these people will need or already need immediate humanitarian aid. The whole families, including children, the elderly and pregnant women, who were forced to leave their houses due to conflict, settle in informal housing colonies, camps or slums located around larger cities. Moreover, people who lived in rented apartments, however were forced to move out due to not

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<sup>36</sup> According to the data of UNHCR, the number of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan exceeds 3.5 million. According to the data of UNHCR, 230 000 people were displaced due to the conflict within just two months leading up to the collapse of the government.

<sup>37</sup> [afg\\_flash\\_appeal\\_2021.pdf \(reliefweb.int\)](#), page 6.

<sup>38</sup> [afg\\_flash\\_appeal\\_2021.pdf \(reliefweb.int\)](#), page 7.

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paying the rent, also live in the outskirts of Kabul. Living conditions in the places inhabited by internally displaced persons are very hard. There is no running water, no access to drinking water, inadequate makeshift waste disposal system, pollution, home-made stoves that generate harmful fumes and the lack of hygiene. Moreover, children do not have access to education or a safe place to play. Especially the winter period is extremely difficult and dangerous for these people. Some people live in ordinary tents in the open space. In addition, the diseases spread very quickly due to high density of population. Every year there are deaths due to hypothermia, untreated respiratory diseases or colds. This year, the number of the deceased will surely increase compared to previous years. Starting from September, over a dozen cases (including eight in one family) of child deaths were recorded within a few weeks, in various camps for internally displaced persons in Kabul. The reason was the lack of food, hygiene measures and cold. Every other child in these places suffers from malnutrition.

The new government undertakes steps aimed at helping the displaced persons in a difficult situation, however the scale of this phenomenon exceeds the state's capabilities many times over. At the beginning of September 2021, the Ministry of Refugees announced a return programme for thousands of people displaced to Kabul from other provinces. Each family that decides to return home is supposed to get 10 000 afghani (about 111 USD), food and fuel for heating. Moreover, assistance in the scope of transport is also supposed to be provided<sup>39</sup>. Relocations began at the beginning of October and they are supposed to be intensively continued until winter. By the beginning of November, about 2 500 people had been displaced from Kabul.

Other reason for internal migrations is climate change, which causes droughts and barren lands in the rural areas, where cultivation is the main (and often the only) source of income. In 2021, Afghanistan suffered the second severe drought in the last four years and it is estimated that it will last until 2022. Many persons engaged in seasonal agricultural work remain unemployed. Moreover, this year the planting and harvesting season coincided with military actions in the country, which made it impossible for many farmers to work normally in the field and restricted the access to their lands. The community from rural areas migrates to cities hoping to get a job beyond the agricultural sector.

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<sup>39</sup> [tolonews.com](https://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/afghan-refugees-need-help-to-rebuild-their-lives) (بی‌جاشدگان داخلی به کمک موسسات به خانه‌های شان برمیگردند | طلوع‌نیوز)

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Furthermore, people also migrate to cities in search of treatment possibilities. As a consequence of the fighting, many medical facilities, particularly in the rural areas, have been damaged and require repair. In addition, a new problem resulting from closure of the borders is the shortage of medications and food, delays or a complete lack of the flow of necessary financial resources, which mainly come from foreign sources, in order to pay the staff and for basic services. Due to this reason, part of health service facilities across the country, including hospitals treating children with the symptoms of malnutrition, have been closed for several months now. Therefore, Afghans from rural areas come to the capital in order to get medical assistance. According to TOLO Tv, the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul has recently noted an increase in the number of admitted children with malnutrition symptoms by 20%. Every day 50 small patients are admitted to the hospital. This increase in children suffering from hunger is caused by: high prices of food resulting among others from closure of the borders and drought, population displacements, nationwide problem with access to the appropriate food and incorrect diets. According to various estimates, 2-3.6 million children in Afghanistan are at risk of malnutrition.

### **4.2. Profile of the persons leaving Afghanistan**

During recent years, the persons leaving Afghanistan have been mostly young men aged 15-25, characterised by lower economic status. Some of them completed secondary education. They left the country due to hard economic situation, the lack of prospects for getting a job, as well as gradually worsening security situation. For the reason of not many possibilities in the scope of legal migration, relatively high costs associated with payments required by smugglers, as well as difficulties and dangers related to travel, women, the elderly or entire families rarely decided to leave the country. Profile of the persons leaving Afghanistan changed at the end of the first half of 2021. The decision concerning withdrawal of international troops, the Taliban's takeover of subsequent provinces and the increasingly realistic perspective of a civil war, resulted in the fact that the entire families also started to make decisions about leaving the country. This was mainly applicable to people with a medium or high economic status, usually educated ones, including many women.

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Owned financial resources usually determine the choice of the country of emigration. The lower amount of funds available for payment required by the smugglers, the closer destination country is chosen. Ethnic origin also to some extent has an impact on the selected country. Hazaras usually go to Iran, while Pashtuns often choose Pakistan. It cannot be clearly indicated that one particular ethnic group is dominant in the case of Europe.

After the fall of the government and takeover by the Taliban, the majority of people leaving Afghanistan are those who cooperated in the past with international forces and NGOs, as well as persons with ties to the former administration, who were unable to leave the country before 15 August as part of the implemented evacuation or on their own, and who feel threatened. Due to closure of the borders of neighbouring countries and high travel costs (the prices of visas and airline tickets for Afghans have increased even tenfold), only wealthy people or those with appropriate connections decide to leave the country via official channels.

Persons with limited financial resources, who currently want to leave Afghanistan, will probably seek refuge in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, where several million Afghan refugees already live, as well as in Turkey. Many refugees live in difficult conditions in these countries, with limited access to food, safe water and health service. Furthermore, their status is uncertain and they are at risk of deportation, as well as subject to various types of threats (human trafficking, physical violence, psychological violence, drug addiction). A small part of these people will try to reach the European Union, which remains a very attractive destination, however it is associated with a higher risk of travel and requires much greater financial resources in order to implement it. Many migrants work illegally for months or even years in various countries located on the migration route to Europe, in order to gradually earn money for payments required by the smugglers. Despite the fact that Afghans are treated in a various manner by individual EU countries, i.e. probability of recognising the need to grant international protection varies depending on the country, it is the final destination of many migrants.

Migrants and terrorist networks often use the same transport routes, which makes it difficult for the host countries to control the inflow of members of the rebel and terrorist organisations into their territories. In the scope of current situation, the neighbouring countries, in particular Iran and Pakistan, are trying to seal their borders, and therefore they exert various types of pressure, including physical violence, on Afghan migrants, in order to prevent them from crossing the border. Nevertheless, the persons leaving Afghanistan are so determined



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that even the cases of bodily injury do not stop them from making subsequent attempts to illegally cross the border. It should be emphasised that cross-border mobility will continue, regardless of any attempts to limit it, until the improvement of security, humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan. Only the prices for assistance in illegal crossing of the border or for obtaining false documents will increase, and the migration route will be more dangerous.

#### **4.3. Decision-making process and funds, migration strategies**

The decisions concerning emigration are rarely made spontaneously, on the spur of the moment or when an opportunity arises. As a result of the high level of poverty and unemployment, most people leaving Afghanistan have to spend some time to collect the financial resources for the trip. The required amount of money increases along with the distance to the destination country. Until the collapse of the government, it was necessary to have between 200-500 USD in order to get to Iran. In October 2021, the price already amounted to 800 USD. It is often the case that savings are not enough, so people borrow money from relatives or close friends for this purpose. Currently, the costs of travel have significantly increased, and this in result prevents or postpones departure for many people. The vast majority of migrants do not plan to return to Afghanistan, while people who have been forced to return even several times, usually still make subsequent attempts to leave the country. Recent data from the *Mixed Migration Center's* survey indicate that out of 1 255 people returning from Europe to Afghanistan, who were interviewed between July 2020 and January 2021, 41 percent intended to re-migrate when the COVID-19 situation will allow it. Another 38 percent were unsure and only 18 percent intended to stay in Afghanistan<sup>40</sup>.

The migration strategies of Afghans are very limited due to difficulties in the scope of legal possibilities of leaving the country. Only a few can count on a visa to one of the EU countries, and only in exceptional cases. There is a small group among them that consists of students leaving the country as part of granted scholarship, or on their own in order to study

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.development-today.com/archive/dt-2021/dt-3-2021/forced-return-of-afghans-hampers-the-pursuit-of-durable-solutions>

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at a private university. After graduation, nobody intends to return to the country and they leave Afghanistan with such attitude.

It is worth to note the emigrations of Afghan diplomats. A very small percentage of persons employed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who leave for a diplomatic facility in other country, decide to return to Afghanistan after their mission is completed. Usually the Afghan diplomats try to legalise their stay in the country, in which they worked, or in another country with which they had some kind of relation. This pattern of behaviour has become so common that the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to avoid losing skilled workers, tried to send abroad only those people who already have a residence permit in another country, but still work in Kabul. It especially applied to the cases of missions in the countries attractive in terms of migration, e.g. Canada, USA, Western European countries. Moreover, it also sometimes happened that some host countries refused to issue a visa to the diplomat's family, due to the fear that it will be used at a later time for migration purposes.

It can be assumed that after the fall of the government and takeover by the Taliban, many diplomats currently staying outside Afghanistan will (after the expiration of their diplomatic documents entitling them to stay in a given country) apply for asylum or international protection.

However, a wave of Afghan refugees flowing into the European Union countries should not be expected. Afghanistan is on the brink of a humanitarian crisis and most national borders remain closed. Despite the upcoming winter and a drop in firewood prices compared to previous years, Afghans cannot even afford to buy firewood. Therefore, it is difficult to expect that they will find money to pay for assistance in the scope of illegal crossing of the border, which has recently increased.

## **4.4. Returns**

As of 1 September 2021, 757 000 undocumented migrants returned from Iran and Pakistan this year alone. According to the predictions, this number may exceed one million by the end of the year. More than half of these people are persons forcibly deported from Iran. In 2020, the number of repatriates from this country amounted to a record number of about

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860 000<sup>41</sup>. This resulted from the economic crisis occurring in Iran, which was caused by the pandemic and sanctions that increased the costs of living and intensified hostility towards the Afghans living there. Currently, there are still 950 000 registered Afghans living in Iran, as well as nearly 1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans. Increased number of returns to Afghanistan is directly affected by high number of people leaving the country. According to the estimates, around 30 000 Afghans leave Afghanistan every week<sup>42</sup>.

As the commercial and administrative centre of the country, Kabul is a place where many repatriates settle after their return, because it offers greater possibilities in the scope of finding a job. Moreover, the destination airport of forced and voluntary returns from EU countries was also located in Kabul. However, due to the deteriorating security situation, most EU countries suspended the forced deportations of Afghans to Afghanistan in mid-2021.

In the case of forced returns, Afghans have difficulty with re-establishing contact with the social environment they have left. It should be emphasised that there is also the issue of misconception about the life in western countries among the families of Afghan emigrants. The dominant belief is that upon reaching one of the European Union countries, every migrant receives a flat, financial support and a number of privileges. They associate migration with a valuable foreign currency. Only few people are aware of the dangers associated with illegal travel, as well as onerousness of staying in camps or guarded refugee centres, homelessness or illegal work in hard conditions. This is what many Afghans returning home have experienced. The issue of incorrect perception of life in emigration is exacerbated by the migrants themselves. Even if they find themselves in a difficult situation due to the problems with legalisation of their stay, the problems with supporting themselves, the lack of money and hard work, they rarely tell their families about their problems. They do not want to worry their loved ones, they are ashamed and feel guilty that they are not resourceful enough. Furthermore, they do not feel like they have the right to complain to their loved ones, who are in a difficult situation, in the country from which they managed to escape. Very often the family pressure and loneliness result in mental problems and depression.

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<sup>41</sup> [afg\\_flash\\_appeal\\_2021.pdf \(reliefweb.int\)](#)

<sup>42</sup> [afg\\_flash\\_appeal\\_2021.pdf \(reliefweb.int\)](#)

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### **4.5. Perspective for the integration**

Currently, return to Afghanistan is associated with more dangers than before, and they do not result only from the Taliban's takeover of the country. A much greater threat faced by Afghans upon their return is the humanitarian crisis: Afghanistan is currently characterised by the second highest level of food insecurity in the world, while the number of people living below the poverty line is increasing. Furthermore, many children struggle with malnutrition. People returning to Afghanistan usually end up in slums, live in tents, tarpaulin huts or clay huts. Moreover, there is no access to water or food, while more than half of persons living in camps for displaced persons or returning migrants are under 18 years of age. These people require immediate humanitarian aid. Repatriates, internally displaced persons and people returning from Europe have no prospects for a decent life, nor a safe future.

People returning to the country after a few or over a dozen years of absence, as well as people who left Afghanistan as small children, cannot find their place in this environment and they are not able to integrate. Afghanistan has changed in the meantime - currently the country is in ruins and the economic problems affect everyone. Not all families have the possibility to provide for and support an unemployed person returning to the country. Furthermore, these persons are at great risk of drug addiction.

Economic situation of returning persons and the lack of jobs hinder effective integration. While leaving Afghanistan, most people borrowed money in order to pay the smugglers. Very often, family or close friends send additional money during travel of such person, because it turned out that there were unforeseen expenses or the smuggler demanded more money. Some people sold their lands and property before leaving, so they have nothing to go back to.

Another significant aspect hindering the integration process for people returning to the country is their mental condition. They are usually filled with guilt, a sense of failure and a feeling that they have let their loved ones down, lost the chance for a better future for themselves and their family, and returned to the starting point. Moreover, there is a social pressure on top of that. Such conditions are associated with a high risk of depression or addiction, particularly in the case of easy and cheap access to drugs.

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### **4.6. Support provided by the government and non-governmental organisations**

The previous government was insufficiently prepared to meet the repatriation needs of families, to overcome obstacles in the scope of displacement and to deal with the continued presence of refugees in neighbouring countries. It was unable to provide protection for returning citizens by ensuring nationwide basic services and minimal support, which led to increasing public discontent and driven the spiral of emigration. Persons voluntarily or forcibly returning to Afghanistan could only rely on their own support networks and social structures. Although the international organisations operating in Kabul that dealt with integration offered one-off financial aid and assistance in starting business activity, there were only few beneficiaries of this programme. The repatriates are in most part uneducated people, depressed by the fact of returning, often lost and confused after a long absence from Afghanistan, who have difficulties with completing formalities required to receive the above-mentioned assistance. The projects implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also included training courses, however they were not popular. The current government has not undertaken any steps so far aimed at improving the situation of the repatriates. The Taliban leaders only encourage Afghans remaining outside the country to return to Afghanistan. They primarily appeal to specialists and educated people to undertake efforts to rebuild the country jointly with the new government.

### **4.7. Perception of persons returning to Afghanistan**

Perception of persons, who returned voluntarily or were deported to Afghanistan, is various – starting from compassion and understanding from immediate family, to malice and mockery from distant relatives, neighbours and friends<sup>43</sup>. One could think that due to the fact that almost every family has a member who has experienced the hardships associated with

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<sup>43</sup> There is a proverb in Persian: (سر خر بالا شدن یک عیب، پائین شدن دیگر عیب) which literally means "getting on a donkey is one problem, getting off it is another", which in this context should be understood that once someone has managed to leave the country, he/she should do everything not to return to it, because it is a disgrace.

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emigration, the majority of society would show understanding or refrain from negative comments. Unfortunately, a large number of people perceive the deported persons as losers, who have missed the chance of a lifetime, spent a considerable amount of money on the journey in vain, and put too little effort to stay in Europe. Nevertheless, the closest family usually tries to support the person, whose trip to Europe ended in return, and feels bad for such family member. During their journey, many of these people experienced (among others) physical violence, psychological violence, enormous stress and sometimes even hunger. It should be emphasised that for people, who returned voluntarily or were deported to Afghanistan, facing social pressure is an extremely hard experience.

Unemployment and the lack of prospects constitute one reason why some part of desperate young men may seek opportunities to join rebel groups. Furthermore, the pandemic also intensified problems with finding a job. People decide to work even for very low wages and in very hard conditions.

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# 5. Role and meaning of the media

## 5.1. Media in Afghanistann

Private media are dominant in Afghanistann. According to the information presented by the Ministry of Information and Culture, there were two state television stations (RTA-TV)<sup>44</sup> and several dozen private channels operating in Afghanistann until the collapse of the government, while most of them were received mainly in Kabul and in large cities. Most private radio and TV stations are owned by Moby Group<sup>45</sup>, whose channels can be watched by the owners of satellite dishes around the world. Television and radio are the most popular media in Afghanistann.

Population in Afghanistann takes less and less interest in the printed press. It should be noted that there is a continued high level of illiteracy<sup>46</sup>, while popularisation of the Internet and the lack of demand for this type of mass media among the society, result in the fact that currently newspapers in Afghanistann are more often used e.g. to wrap burgers sold on the street than reading.

Particularly among the younger generation, the Internet and social media, e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even Tiktok, are getting more and more important as a source of information<sup>47</sup>. Along with the development of telecommunications infrastructure and the emergence of a fibre optic network, the number of users is continuously increasing.

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<sup>44</sup> In reality, there is only one state-owned channel called RTA-TV, because the second state-owned channel is very difficult to access.

<sup>45</sup> Moby Group – it is the biggest media company in Afghanistann. It was established in 2002 by Afghan-Australian businessman Saad Mohseni. The company started with one radio station - Arman FM. Currently, it is the owner of the most popular station - TOLO TV and it has over a dozen offices throughout Afghanistann, as well as in South and Central Asia, and the Middle East.

<sup>46</sup> Illiteracy of Afghanistann residents (above 15 years old) is estimated at 12 million (7.2 million women, 4.8 million men) out of the total population of 39.6 million people (<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-stands-all-afghans-ensure-youth-and-adults-Afghanistann-especially-women-and-girls>). The Afghan Ministry of Education announced that over a million Afghans have benefited from the literacy programmes during the last decade. Currently, the national illiteracy reduction and eradication strategy is also successively implemented, and it is supposed to be in force until 2030. Its objective is to achieve a literacy rate in Afghanistann up to 60 percent.

<sup>47</sup> There were 8.64 million internet users noted in Afghanistann in January 2021. Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-Afghanistann>

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However, the cost of the Internet in Afghanistan is ten times higher than in neighbouring countries, while the quality of services is much lower<sup>48</sup>.

Since the United States announced the decision concerning withdrawal of its troops, the situation of media has deteriorated. Many foreign-language radio and television stations, which were funded by embassies or philanthropic organisations, reduced or completely closed down their activity, at the same time eliminating the jobs of many Afghan journalists. After the Taliban took over Kabul, most of the foreign reporters left Afghanistan.

### **5.2. Access to mass media**

Access to the Internet, television and radio differs depending on a given region and its advancement level of the telecommunications and energy infrastructure. In the case of large cities, the vast majority of population has access to various types of mass media. It is possible to see a TV or a radio in every house, office, store or restaurant. Furthermore, there is also a possibility to use free WIFI network in some places in Kabul<sup>49</sup>. The situation is different in areas more distant from the agglomeration, where people do not have such direct media access, due to the lack of electricity and less developed telecommunications infrastructure. In these areas the radio is definitely dominant, because its waves are the easiest to access. Moreover, there are also local radio stations to which people can listen even during power outages, by using a battery-powered radio<sup>50</sup>.

Anyone who wants and has funds can get a satellite dish, which allows to receive a larger number of stations in better quality. However, as one of the forbidden symbols of Western culture, such satellite dishes are usually less visible in the areas taken over by the Taliban.

Everyone in Kabul has at least one mobile phone and sometimes even several<sup>51</sup>. However, this is not the case in rural areas, where there is a greater degree of poverty and a

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<sup>48</sup> The monthly cost of Internet in Kabul for 4 GB amounts to 450 afghani (5 USD)

<sup>49</sup> Kabul International Airport, government buildings, some hotels, popular restaurants, sale offices of telecommunications services.

<sup>50</sup> Power outages occur very often, therefore it is a good idea to get a power bank. Due to power outages and spikes in current, electronic devices (e.g. chargers and telephones) deteriorate very quickly.

<sup>51</sup> This results from differences in the operation and coverage of individual mobile networks in Kabul. Some networks are characterised by better coverage indoors, while others on the road. People, who want to have continuous contact and access to the Internet, buy several devices and various telecommunications networks.



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mobile phone is not a basic necessity. Nevertheless, there is still at least one telephone number assigned per family or household.

### **5.3. Significance of media in everyday life**

Afghans are tired of the war, which has lasted for four decades, as well as the news about subsequent attacks and their victims. In result, after turning on the TV or radio, they usually look for relaxing shows and Turkish series, which are very popular in Afghanistan<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, the interests and watched shows mainly depend on the age of a person. Young people most often watch entertainment shows and music programmes, which are currently unavailable on the TV and can be found only on the Internet. Many young people are addicted to foreign crime series or romance series, as well as lifestyle shows. Some young people follow their role models from the TV or the Internet, and imitate the way celebrities dress or their hairstyles. However, the Afghan culture is still deeply rooted in society, and people identify with it, as well as cultivate its elements inherited from previous generations. Middle-aged people choose the news<sup>53</sup>, political, social and economic shows. They are interested in debates concerning the situations from everyday life.

Afghan media are not only a source of information, but also an opportunity to spend some time together (e.g. by watching TV series together), as well as a space for mutual communication and exchange of views.

### **5.4. Situation of journalists; attacks**

Nowadays, the Afghan journalists mainly consist of representatives of the younger generation, characterised by more liberal views. Majority of modern independent journalism platforms are owned and run by young people. Most of them were born after 2001<sup>54</sup> and have not experienced the strict law imposed by the Taliban reign in the 1990s. These young people

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<sup>52</sup> It happens that some TV series are so popular that the mullah decides to change the time of prayer, so that more faithful people can participate in the prayer and that he himself can watch the series.

<sup>53</sup> The most popular are the news, which are broadcast every day on the private TOLO news channel at 6 p.m. and which last 30 minutes.

<sup>54</sup> The average age of people in Afghanistan is 19.5 years old <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/Afghanistan/#people-and-society>

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grew up during the years of presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)<sup>55</sup>, as well as international organisations fighting (among others) for human rights, reduction of illiteracy, access to schools regardless of gender or social status. This results in the fact that current younger generation knows what questions to ask, demands respect for civil rights and open space for discussion. While growing up with access to the Internet, they know very well what human rights and corruption are, and they are also familiar with various models of the functioning of states. This has an enormous impact on their work, the selection of topics, as well as the way such topics are presented.

The attacks on journalists constituted a tool used to pressure the government of Ashraf Ghani. For the Taliban, the journalists are spies working for the West and the Afghan government. Since the commencement of peace negotiations, the Taliban has focused more than ever on taking control of the narrative with the use of social media and by attacking the journalists. The journalists have always been exposed to attacks, however since the Taliban leaders have officially referred to the journalists from 1TV and TOLO TV as personal enemies and their stations as the target for attacks (in 2015)<sup>56</sup>, the scale of the attacks has increased. In 2016, a Taliban suicide bomber attacked TOLO station employees, who travelled by bus, killing seven of them and injuring at least 25<sup>57</sup>. The rapid increase in the number of attacks on media employees occurred in September 2020, i.e. when the peace talks with the Taliban were resumed. The Taliban warned journalists against subjective presentation of information and siding with the government. The Taliban spokesperson - Zabihullah Mujahid has repeatedly called on the journalists to present the information objectively and not to be turned into a propaganda tool of the government.

Attacks on journalists, as well as threats against them, have an enormous impact on the quality of presented information. Repressions and terror result in self-censorship. Even before the fall of the government, in some areas controlled by the Taliban, the local officials, who were under pressure from the Taliban, demanded that journalists end certain political and

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<sup>55</sup> ISAF – operational forces of NATO member states responsible for keeping order in Afghanistan in the period from 2001 to 2014.

<sup>56</sup> <https://waccglobal.org/media-barriers-in-Afghanistann/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-21/car-bomb-explodes-near-russian-embassy-in-kabul/7103150>

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entertainment shows. This resulted in the fact that journalists themselves (while fearing the consequences) thought twice before broadcasting a given programme.

Female journalists were the target of attacks as much as men. According to the data published in the spring of 2021 by the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee<sup>58</sup>, the wave of killings of female media employees resulted in the situation, in which within several months over three hundred journalists from thirty-four provinces resigned from their jobs, due to fear for their own safety. Many of them left the country. Station owners also no longer want to employ women due to fear for their safety. After the attacks on female journalists that took place in December 2020 and March 2021 in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province<sup>59</sup>, Enikaas TV station decided not to employ any more female reporters, and the ones previously employed were given an instruction to work from home. The so-called Islamic State, which controls the Nangarhar Province, took responsibility for these attacks on female journalists.

In March 2021, another organisation that works to protect the rights of journalists - Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ)<sup>60</sup> published a report, in which it informed that over 100 cases of aggression against female journalists were recorded during the last year, including homicides, threats, physical assaults and verbal assaults. Repressions and violence against media representatives still continue and also affect female journalists, whose situation is much more difficult due to their gender. Women in Afghanistan are still facing the aversion of certain part of the patriarchal society, which believes that women should

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<sup>58</sup> Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) – it is an independent non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Kabul, which supports press freedom in Afghanistan. It carries out activities aimed at the advancement of journalist safety and their rights. AJSC was established as a result of recommendation of the Kabul Conference on Freedom of Expression, which was organised in March 2009 by International Media Support. AJSC has its own board of advisors consisting of well-known media employees and civil society activists. The executive section of AJSC has official representatives in eight regions of the country, as well as an unofficial contact point in the remaining 26 provinces. This allows AJSC to establish representation throughout the country and to provide media employees with necessary assistance. Source: <https://ajsc.af/who-we-are/>

<sup>59</sup> In March, two attacks carried out by an armed man against female journalists from Enikaas TV took place in Nangarhar, which resulted in the killing of two of them - Mursal Habibi and Saadia, and Nazia was injured. In December 2020, Malalai Maiwand, who was a reporter of Enikaas TV, and her driver were shot and killed by an unknown man.

<sup>60</sup> Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ) – it is the first Afghan NGO founded by female journalists for other female journalists, in order to support and protect them, as well as to uphold the press freedom in Afghanistan. This organisation was established in 2017 and it cooperates (among others) with the international organisation called Reporters without Borders. CPAWJ has its headquarters in Kabul and representative offices in 21 provinces.

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stay at home. There are situations, in which the family does not approve of the woman's choice of work, however agrees to it, because she is the only breadwinner of the family. For women, the social pressure and pressure from their families constitute a factor that weighs heavily on their psyche.

Despite many appeals made by journalists' organisations to intensify efforts aimed at protecting the journalists, the situation has not improved. The former government was too weak to provide effective protection for the journalists. The journalists received threats and were killed without warning. After the Taliban took power in the country, many of them left Afghanistan due to fear of death.

After the collapse of the government, the situation of journalists became even more difficult. They can no longer count on the help and protection of the authorities even in theory, because in this case the authorities are the perpetrator. Within two months from the takeover of power, the Taliban arrested 32 journalists and some of them were beaten<sup>61</sup>. Many journalists fled the country and a large number of them remain in hiding. The Taliban use threats, intimidation and violence against the journalists. Moreover, there is also talk about targeted killings of the media representatives. The government's attitude towards journalists is evidenced by the appointment of Mohammad Ashraf Ghairat to the position of rector of the University of Kabul in mid-September, who published posts on Twitter in June and December 2020 that justified and incited violence against the journalists<sup>62</sup>.

According to the information published by TOLO news, more than 200 independent media outlets – particularly those operating outside large cities - were closed in the second half of October 2021, while 70 percent of journalists across the country lost their jobs. Many journalists had to get a job involving hard physical labour in order to support themselves and their families.

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/node/380049/printable/print>

<sup>62</sup> Quote: “A journalist-spy is more dangerous than a hundred soldiers. I will doubt in the faith of anyone who refrains from killing journalists. Kill the journalists-spies.”

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### 5.5. The Taliban in the context of media

After taking power in Kabul in the mid-1990s, the Taliban introduced an order modelled based on the extremist perception of sharia law. Some of the rules applied directly to the media and consisted of a complete ban on listening to radio, music and watching TV, under the penalty of physical punishment or restriction of freedom. All TV and radio stations were destroyed or closed. After the Taliban took power in 2021, many TV and radio stations, due to fear of similar restrictions and knowing that some shows would not be acceptable to the new regime, decided to change the broadcast contents themselves. Tolo TV, which is known for its news and entertainment programmes, decided to remove music shows and soap operas from the radio programmes. The love drama series were replaced by a Turkish TV series set in the Ottoman times, with actresses dressed in a more conservative manner. The state television RTA-TV decided to withdraw the female presenters until further notice. The independent female-led Zan TV stopped broadcasting new shows. However, not all stations changed under the pressure. The private news channel Ariana TV kept the presence of women on the air. Similarly, TOLO TV, which broadcasts a female-led breakfast programme once a week, still has one female news presenter and several female reporters visible during the broadcasts of news programmes.

The vast majority of the Taliban leaders are against the media and perceive it as a tool of Western culture. After takeover of the country, the Taliban suspended the printing of more than 150 types of press. On the other hand, the Taliban is aware of the power of the Internet and uses popular social networks for propaganda purposes. Moreover, many Taliban members have accounts on well-known platforms, e.g. Facebook and Twitter. A very famous example is the Twitter account run by the Taliban spokesperson. Zabihullah Mujahid publishes several posts every day and his account is followed by about 419 000 people. Moreover, this number is increasing every day<sup>63</sup>. In 2014, Zabihullah Mujahid got a proof of the power of the Internet and Twitter, when during publication of his post, he forgot about the enabled geolocation function, which published information regarding his location against his will<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> The number of followers as of 30.10.2021.

<sup>64</sup> One of the tweets published by Zabihullah Mujahid indicated Sindh in Pakistan as his location, which caused some controversy, because Pakistan is often accused of secret ties with the Taliban, as well as

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Despite the fact that in mid-October 2021, most ministries in the new government had already filled the position of a press spokesperson, the journalists widely complain about the lack of cooperation with the government, as well as the lack of possibility to verify emerging information. The persons responsible for contact with the media do not inform journalists about the actions of their ministry. Moreover, most government websites have stopped working. Among others, the reason for decision regarding closure of many independent media outlets was the lack of possibility to carry out reliable journalism work.

### **5.6. Censorship and national regulations**

All productions broadcast in the country, regardless of their domestic or foreign origin, always had to meet the specified moral standards. This was determined by the Mass Media Act of 2008. It indicated that all stations are obliged to comply with the principles of Islam, national, spiritual and moral values, as well as mental security of the Afghan nation<sup>65</sup>. Due to this reason, while turning on the TV – regardless of whether it is a private or state channel – and watching foreign productions, it is possible to stumble upon (among others) a censored image of exposed female body (e.g. cleavage, legs) or intimate scenes (e.g. kissing, hugging). It should be expected that the new government will intensify these restrictions.

Censorship issues and cases of associated media regulation caused discussions and disputes even prior to the collapse of the government, because religious scholars intervened in the scope of determination whether the broadcast media contents complied with Islamic principles or not. In some cases the decisions made by the Ulama Council - the highest body of key Islamic leaders primarily funded by the government - were inconsistent with the constitutional law. The problem is that in the absence of a precise definition in the scope of what exactly constitutes Islamic or non-Islamic media contents, the conservative groups have a tendency to use religion to promote their views<sup>66</sup>.

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supporting and sheltering the Taliban leaders. Zabihullah Mujahid denied that he was outside Afghanistann during that time and described this entire situation as a hostile plot to hack his account.

<sup>65</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/19SuwTRHCLjsYDEFoefL0-oimyjll1Ek\\_/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19SuwTRHCLjsYDEFoefL0-oimyjll1Ek_/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>66</sup> [WACC | Media barriers in Afghanistann \(waccglobal.org\)](http://waccglobal.org)

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Until 15 August, the state television officially did not allow women without a head covering to be seen in front of the cameras<sup>67</sup>. However, in the private TV stations the situation was different. The most popular TOLO TV channel had female presenters with their head coverings pulled back and their hair exposed. While watching the iconic entertainment shows in Afghanistan, e.g. *the Voice of Afghanistan* or *Afghan Star*, it was possible to observe more and more women exposing their hair, among the participants, jury members, as well as the audience.

In September 2021, the head of the Taliban provisional government - Qari Yousef Ahmadi announced 11 rules, which the Afghan media and journalists shall follow:

1. It is prohibited to publish content contrary to Islam.
2. State personalities cannot be offended by the actions of the media.
3. State space and privacy cannot be offended.
4. Journalists and the media cannot distort the content of the news.
5. During creation of content, the journalists should take into account the principles of journalism.
6. In their publications, the media must take the balance into account.
7. Exercise caution in the scope of publishing topics characterised by questionable credibility, which have not been validated by the relevant authorities.
8. Exercise caution in the scope of publishing topics that may have a negative impact on public opinion or that may violate people's spirituality.
9. In their publications, the media must remain neutral and publish only truth.
10. The Government Media Centre will make effort to cooperate with the media and journalists, as well as to facilitate the preparation of reports. Subsequently, the media will prepare their own detailed reports in consultation with the Centre.
11. For the convenience of the media and journalists, the Government Media Office drawn up a special form for the preparation of reports in cooperation with it.

Source: FarsNews<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Mass Media Act of 2008

<sup>68</sup><https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14000629000174/%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF->

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The new rules applicable to the media were introduced without consultations with the journalistic community, and in practice they completely prohibit any criticism of the Taliban. Moreover, these rules are unclear and leave a big space for any interpretation, which could easily lead to persecution. While adhering to the above-mentioned rules, the journalists have no possibility to expose corruption and abuses in the government. Many independent media outlets perceived this as an attempt to silence them, and decided to close down due to the lack of tools to present objective content and to investigate the truth. Currently, it is necessary to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Information and Culture in order to broadcast a political programme.

Introduction of the above-mentioned rules was accompanied by numerous violations of the work, equipment and bodily inviolability of the journalists themselves. The cases of shootings, torture and detentions were noted. Furthermore, more than a dozen journalists were arrested for trying to report on the women's protest. On 7 September 2021, the Taliban security forces detained Taghi Darjabi and Nemat Naghdi – the journalists from the Kabul media portal called Etelaat Ruz. They reported on the women's protests in Kabul, who demanded an end to women's rights abuses by the Taliban. Furthermore, the journalists were taken to the Kabul police station, placed in separate cells and severely beaten with the use of cables. After their release, both men required medical attention<sup>69</sup>.

### 5.7. Freedom of speech

In general, the media in Afghanistan were largely reflecting reality until 15 August. Nevertheless, the pro-government state television presented certain issues differently than the independent private television. The state television, which was considered to be corrupt, presented positive reviews and reactions of citizens to the government's actions. The discussions concerning the existing challenges or problems, which the government was

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[%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF](#)

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/08/Afghanistann-taliban-severely-beat-journalists#>



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unable to resolve, were not often broadcast. On the other hand, the independent media followed and presented corruption scandals, the cases of government incompetence or social problems. Due to greater objectivity and independence, the private media enjoyed greater trust among the population. Unfortunately, freedom of speech is currently severely restricted in Afghanistan, which has a negative impact on the level of credibility. Nevertheless, the private stations are still the primary source of information for the society.

Even prior to the Taliban's takeover of the country, the journalists more and more often faced the problem of freedom of expression. During implementation of psychological warfare and demonstration of force between the government and the Taliban, the media constituted an essential tool that they wanted to use to exert pressure. The journalists were intimidated and accused of propaganda activities for the benefit of the government. Nevertheless, the private media in Afghanistan fully exercised their right to publicly express their views, and the work of journalists was recognised not only in the country, but also abroad. In December 2020, Transparency International (which is an international independent and non-governmental organisation researching, disclosing and combating corruption practices) granted an award to the Afghan journalist - Etelaat Ruz:

“Zaki Daryabi and Etelaat Ruz Newspaper have been selected as the recipients of the Anti-Corruption Award 2020 for their tireless efforts in exposing major corruption scandals in Afghanistan, despite the multiple challenges, threats and limitations they have had to overcome. They serve as an admirable example to journalists and young activists across the globe through their perseverance and sustainable approach to holding power to account”<sup>70</sup>.

## **5.9. Power of the media**

Year by year, the media are gaining more importance and influence reality in a greater manner. All kinds of Afghans - from educated urban youth to rural mullahs, opium farmers and the Taliban - use social media. Social media are also used by the journalists to keep in touch with the rebels. Popular publications have also become a platform for discussions, e.g. about

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/botakoz-kopbayeva-and-zaki-daryabi-etilaat-roz-newspaper-winners-of-2020-anti-corruption-award#>

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domestic violence against women, which once constituted a taboo. Moreover, the charity fundraisers are also implemented with the use of the Internet<sup>71</sup>. Power of the media more than once resulted in the fact that the government changed or withdrew a previously issued decision. One of such cases occurred in March 2021, when the Head of Education for the City of Kabul issued a total ban on public speaking for female students over the age of 12. This decision was met by immediate objection from the Internet users, and it caused numerous accusations of violating the rights and freedoms of girls, as well as returning to the practices used by the Taliban. As a result of public reaction, the ban was quickly withdrawn.

Furthermore, the Afghan media played an essential role in exposing the fraud during the 2009 and 2014 presidential elections. In 2009, they became the main reason for the decision to organise a second round of elections. During that time, the media reported about over a million false votes in the first round for then-president Hamid Karzai, which increased his result to 54 percent and provided him with the majority required to win elections in the first round. Ultimately, the second round of elections was not held, because his main opponent - dr Abdullah Abdullah refused to participate in it, explaining that the final result will be falsified in favour of the incumbent president anyway. In 2014, during the next presidential election, the private Tolo TV station broadcast a report on election fraud. During that time, Zahir Zahir (head of Kabul security) accused Ziaullagh Amarkhil (head of the independent election commission office) of fraud, after a truck full of unsecured election materials was stopped by the police in one of Kabul's boroughs. The reports once again influenced the decision of dr Abdullah Abdullah - one of the lead candidates - about not accepting the results of the second round. The politician was very disappointed and called on his supporters to protest against the disregard for democracy and to start a demonstration. It resulted in the creation of an organisation in Kabul named the Anti-Fraud Movement (*džanbesz-e zed-e taghalob*).

Another example proving the power of the Internet is the decision of former president Ashraf Ghani, who in 2015 cancelled the contract between the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and Khalil Firuzi - a former director of Kabul Bank – who was sentenced in 2014 to 15 years in prison for embezzlement and money laundering. The decision was made almost

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<sup>71</sup> After the mudflow in Badakhshan in 2014, a fundraiser was organised that allowed to gather financial aid for the victims.

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immediately (24 hours after signing of the contract) due to widespread criticism from the citizens and activists expressed in the media.

In June 2021, the Afghan Ministry of National Defense for the first time published video materials presenting attacks by the government forces on the Taliban troops<sup>72</sup>. This was supposed to demonstrate the ability of the Afghan army to effectively resist the rebels and to raise the society's morale.

Currently, many influencers and regular social media users, who criticised the Taliban in the past, have either deleted their posts and tweets or deleted their accounts altogether, due to the fear of persecution. Despite the fact that the Taliban announced amnesty for every person supporting the previous government, the society does not trust these declarations. There are reports of individual cases of persecution, as well as searches for persons, who criticised the Taliban in the past.

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<sup>72</sup> [\(20+\) Watch | Facebook](#)

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## **6. Urban transport and communication with other regions of the country. Trade and travel; access to the airport in Kabul, postal services and telecommunication**

As the administrative and economic centre of the country, Kabul is one of the fastest developing and at the same time the most congested cities in the world. The city lies in a basin and it is surrounded by mountain ranges. Moreover, the Asmaje and Szir Darwaze mountains also pass through the centre of the city, and divide it into the northeast and southwest, which to a large degree determines its infrastructure. Furthermore, the Kabul river flows through the city, however nowadays it is practically only an intermittent river. It used to divide the city into two parts, but currently its riverbed is filled with waste. Quick development of the city and its suburbs, as well as increase in the number of new housing estates caused by the influx of returning migrants and the rural population, resulted in an increase in the demand for transport and its frequency.

The latest estimation data indicate that the population of Kabul exceeds 4 300 000 people. In total, the city covers 1 023 square kilometres, and it is characterised by a population density of 4 500 residents per square kilometre<sup>73</sup>.

The private transport supplements the offer of the public transport. From a logistical viewpoint, travelling is simple, because buses are available 24 hours a day and the prices are affordable. However, congestion and poor condition of the roads affect the safety and comfort of travel. Unfortunately, due to the mountainous terrain, travelling from east to west or from north to south takes a long time. During winter, many roads located in the mountains are completely closed, due to layers of snow. As a result, certain provinces, e.g. Daykundi Province and partly Badakhshan Province, are cut off from the rest of the country during winter.

Right after the Taliban took over the country, the level of common crime rapidly decreased. People were afraid of the Taliban and the punishments they imposed. However, recently the number of muggings, robberies and kidnappings for ransom has increased again. One reason for that is poverty, and another is the perception of the Taliban as milder compared

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<sup>73</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/kabul-population>

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to their reign in the 1990s. During that time, the sellers in Kabul could leave their stores open and go e.g. to pray in a mosque, without having to fear that anything will be stolen.

### 6.1. Urban transport

Urban transport in Kabul is divided into: formal state transport, formal private transport and informal private transport. The first one consists of city buses driving inside the city, operated by Milli Bus. The cost of one travel ticket amounts to 5 afghani (0.33 PLN). These buses are characterised by infrequent runs and they also pull up outside the designated stops, which extends the journey. The more popular means of transport are faster and more comfortable state and private minibuses, which are eagerly used by women. Moreover, there are also minibuses driving in the city that are intended only for women. The average fare amounts to 10 afghani (0.66 PLN). In Afghanistan, the taxi sharing system is the most common, i.e. the so-called *lajni* (it literally means "line"), which collects passengers travelling in the same direction, usually along a single road. In order to reach a given destination, often a passenger must change such taxi even several times. Furthermore, there are also taxis of *darbast* type (it literally means "closed doors"), which allow to travel without a co-passenger. In addition, the special Kabul Taxi application emerged recently, which can be used to order a taxi. All formal means of transport must be registered in the Ministry of Transport. There are no designated areas for bus turning loops in Kabul, therefore the buses park on the roadside. Buses and minibuses do not operate based on the timetables in Kabul, but rather based on the number of passengers. The bus commences its journey after it is adequately filled with passengers. Therefore, it is difficult to precisely plan the time of arrival at the destination in the case of choosing this form of transport.

Due to very large urban population, the formal system is not able to fulfil the needs of all passengers in Kabul. Shared taxis that operate as part of the informal transport system supplement the above-mentioned deficit. This type of transport is currently dominant in the capital of Afghanistan and it is eagerly used e.g. by women from the neighbourhood, who work or study in the same place (the same driver comes to pick them up and drives them home every day). It is necessary to emphasise that the majority of people living in Kabul are migrants who do not own land or real estate. A car constitutes a good investment for some of these people, therefore many drivers use cars to make money. There are people for whom driving

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passengers is the only occupation, and they work this way all day long, but there are also those for whom the transport services are a way to obtain additional income, and they perform it only occasionally, usually during peak hours when the fares are higher.

The least expensive means of transport are motorised rickshaws, which are running on short distances. Despite the fact that they are relatively fast, due to high carbon dioxide emissions, as well as the difficulties they cause for other users of the roads, they can only drive around the old Kabul.

The informal private means of transport include taxis of *darbast* and *lajni* type. Due to the fact that the cars that informally provide transport services are not registered anywhere, nor marked as taxis, there have been cases of kidnapping passengers for ransom. During evening hours or when there is less traffic on the roads, it is much safer, particularly for women and wealthier people, to use registered white and yellow taxis. Unfortunately, this is sometimes associated with a higher fare.

The travelling Kabul residents must also face traffic jams, which are caused by the rapid growth of urban population, with the simultaneous lack of proper development of the road infrastructure.

Furthermore, a significant inconvenience for Kabul residents is the lack of a ring road around the city. Although there is a regulation that prohibits heavy cars from using the city roads from 5:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., the overnight passages of loaded vehicles significantly damage the roads. The ruts, as well as the lack of road maintenance, poor quality of materials and the changing climate (hot in the dry season, rainy season, frost) result in the fact that even new roadways require repairs after just one year. Moreover, the damaged roads have a negative impact on driving safety and condition of the cars, especially buses, which are quickly taken out of service due to the resulting defects.

It should be emphasised that most intersections in the city do not have traffic lights, and in the case when they do, the traffic lights do not work or are completely ignored by drivers. In the locations characterised by the highest traffic, the vehicles are directed by a person specially designated for this purpose by the Ministry of the Interior. In some cases, during rush hours there are several such persons working at one intersection, and they are forced to block the streets one by one with portable spike barriers, in order to effectively stop the traffic on one side, so that cars from the opposite direction can safely cross the intersection. Moreover,

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persons performing this job are exposed to insults and physical violence from nervous drivers, who want to get through the jammed streets as quickly as possible. Insufficient traffic discipline and the lack of compliance with road traffic regulations often result in chaotic and dangerous situations, which are not limited to rush hours.

In addition, there were frequent roadblocks occurring for safety reasons, due to the presence of governmental institutions and international entities in Kabul. In such cases, the vehicles are directed to side roads, which are characterised by low capacity. Traffic in Kabul is chaotic and unpredictable, particularly in the case, when the above-mentioned roadblock occurs. In such situation, the gigantic traffic jams are formed, which can extend the travel time up to two hours. It is necessary to take such circumstances into account, particularly when trying to get to the airport.

There are no parking lots in Kabul. The cars are parked along the streets and they occupy the lanes. This naturally reduces capacity and constitutes another cause of traffic jams.

Furthermore, there are no bike paths in Afghanistan, so cyclists move along the street. The bikes are popular means of transport, particularly among students, and they are also used by traders to transport goods. They do not generate costs like taxi transport and, unlike e.g. buses, they are available all the time. During the day, it is possible to observe many bikes loaded to the limit.

Rush hours in Kabul start at 7 a.m. and around 3 p.m., and they usually last approximately two hours. The shortage of vehicles providing transport services is more affecting women, who want to catch a taxi carrying fellow passengers. Firstly, the drivers are reluctant to pick up women, because male passengers avoid sitting next to women for moral reasons. Thus, it means that the driver will have more difficulty in the scope of collecting the full set of passengers. Secondly, in principle women are smaller and weaker physically, so they have a hard time getting through the crowd of men, who are also trying to get a taxi. Moreover, there are no bus stops or taxi stands in the city. In order to catch a vehicle, it is necessary to walk along the street and wait for someone to stop. There are also certain junctions, which constitute local communication nodes, where the routes of *lajni*-type taxis intersect, and the residents can use them to conveniently change their transport.

Transport does not fully meet the needs of Kabul residents, which results in the fact that many of them, in the case of short distances to cover, e.g. to the local marketplace or school,

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decide to cover such distance on foot. There is a good chance that due to traffic jams, such person will reach its destination faster on foot than by vehicle. Due to widespread occurrence of trade and sales stands, many sidewalks are completely occupied by the sellers and their merchandise. Moreover, the pedestrian paths are in poor condition, and in certain locations they are so narrow, due to the ramparts around government buildings, that pedestrians are forced to walk on the street and disrupt the car traffic.

Gender is also significant when it comes to choosing the means of transport. Women often use minibuses in order to travel as part of a group and to avoid lonely taxi journeys, both for fear of sexual assault, harassment, as well as economic reasons - the minibuses are cheaper.



This photograph shows the road infrastructure and one of the bus turning loops in Kabul. Moreover, it is possible to see the slums in the background, at the foot of the mountain. Private archive.



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### 6.2. Communication with other regions of the country

The Salang Tunnel is located 120 km from Kabul at an altitude of 3400 m above sea level and it is characterised by crucial commercial and communication importance, because it is the only road connecting the capital with northern provinces of the country. Even ten thousand vehicles can pass this way every day. The tunnel was commissioned in 1964, and currently its condition requires renovation and installation of a good ventilation. This tunnel is over two and a half kilometres long, it has two-way traffic and vehicles emit poisonous exhaust fumes in it. During winter, very often happens that due to heavy snowfall, the tunnel may be impassable for several days. However, the most dangerous are avalanches, which may result in the blockage of the tunnel's entrance and exit<sup>74</sup>.

Another significant communication route is the south-west road leading to Herat, through (among others): Ghazni, Kandahar and Farah. It constitutes the main trade route that leads overland to Iran, Turkey and subsequently to Europe. Despite the fact that the renovation of this route was one of the most expensive investments in the scope of expansion of road infrastructure during the administration of President Hamid Karzai, the current condition of the road is characterised by very low quality and requires further repairs. As a result of corruption, the quality of used material was much lower than assumed. Furthermore, the trucks driving on the roads in Afghanistan are often overloaded, with even twice the allowed load. After the collapse of the government, there were many cases of robberies and attacks on this route, especially in the Ghazni Province, carried out by the rebel groups. In particular, people of Hazaras origin travelling this route were exposed to a high risk of robbery, theft and even murder.

The third significant trade and communication route is the road from Kabul to Peshawar in Pakistan. This road is very attractive in the visual aspect, due to the fact that it leads from the high mountains of Afghanistan to Pakistan, which is located much lower. While travelling along the serpentine, it is possible to see three dams: Band Mahipar, Band

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<sup>74</sup> There was an avalanche in 2017, which completely blocked the entry and exit from the Salang Tunnel. Over 100 people, who were in the tunnel at that time, died as a result of the lack of oxygen and low temperature.

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Naghlo and Band Sorubi. It is one of two main roads leading to Pakistan<sup>75</sup>, and it is usually chosen by suppliers, due to very good subsequent connection to the port in Karachi. Moreover, this route is also characterised by extremely significant strategic importance, which is evidenced by the fact that military equipment for the troops stationed in Afghanistan was delivered this way until 15 August. The Pakistani government used it more than once for political purposes and closed the state border on this route, in order to put pressure on the Afghan government.

It is possible to travel from Kabul to other provinces by bus - there are bus stations located at every exit road from Kabul - and by *laini*-type taxis, both registered and private ones.

Women never travel alone – for safety purposes they should always be accompanied by a male family member or an elderly woman.

Prior to the collapse of the government, when deciding to travel outside Kabul, it was necessary to take into account the risk of getting robbed. As a result, people avoided carrying cash or valuables and they tried to travel during the day. Moreover, sometimes they also put on traditional clothes, particularly during journeys to the southern provinces.

After the Taliban took power in the country, the bus stations were overcrowded with travellers trying to leave the country due to safety reasons, uncertain future, as well as increasing unemployment.

### **6.3. Trade**

The capital constitutes the centre of economic activity, therefore the largest number of banks and corporate headquarters are located here. Kabul residents primarily work in trade and services, e.g. construction services. In addition to many bazaars and marketplaces, which can be found in every borough, Kabul also has modern malls located in richer boroughs, e.g. *Kheir Chane* and *Shahr-e Nau*. They mainly offer clothing and footwear.

Door-to-door trade is also very popular, particularly among the poorer part of society. Such seller is mobile and can move depending on the traffic, as well as customers, and does not have to pay rent or tax, so it has a positive effect on the prices of the products. The

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<sup>75</sup> The second road to Pakistan leads through Kandahar.

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popularity of this type of trade results in the fact that carts with goods occupy entire lanes of streets and often completely block the traffic of cars. A good example is the area by the Pul-e Cheshti mosque in the old borough of Kabul, where out of six lanes only one can be used by cars.

In practice, every borough has at least one large marketplace. The most popular sale location (in particular wholesale) is Bazar-e Mandawi in the city centre. It is also the oldest bazaar in Kabul, which is characterised by historical importance. Another well-known location of retail sale is Bazar-e Lycee Mariam in the *Kheir Chane* borough in the district 11. Recently, the supermarkets have also become popular in Kabul, particularly the 'Finest' chain.

It is often possible to meet food traders on the street, who mainly sell hot and cold dishes, soups and fruit juices. Usually street food is bought only by the locals. Someone who is not used to it may experience severe indigestion-related consequences. This type of food is contaminated, because it is sold on busy streets, where cars emit exhaust fumes and there is a lot of dust in the air. Moreover, due to the low quality of sewage system, many fumes from the excrement float in the air and deposit, among others, on food sold in the streets.

#### **6.4. Access to the airport**

Kabul International Airport is located in the district 15, only five kilometres from the city centre. Due to the surrounding mountains, it is considered to be one of the most difficult airports for pilots. There are two main roads that can be used to reach the airport. One of them leads through the centre of Kabul via Wazir Akbar Chan, while the other from the north of the city. On 9 September, the new government changed the previous name from the Hamid Karzai International Airport (which has been used since 2014) to Kabul International Airport (Mejdan-e Hawai-e Kabul).

Until the Taliban took power in the country, air transport in Afghanistan was provided by several domestic and international carriers (domestic and foreign carriers), while the Kabul airport was the busiest in the country, also due to the military base located next to it. The flights to Dubai and Islamabad were carried out every day.

After the collapse of the government, the Taliban took control of this airport and as a result, the airport was out of use for about a month and a half. At the beginning of October, the technical problems were resolved and the airport began standard operation in the scope of

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domestic flights. The ticket prices did not change and fluctuate around 100 USD, depending on the destination. Domestic flights are a very popular method of travel due to significantly quicker arrival at the destination<sup>76</sup>.

The first direction that was implemented in the scope of international flights was the Kabul – Islamabad route, operated only by the Pakistani airlines called PIA (Pakistan International Airlines). In this case, the ticket price initially increased from 150 – 200 USD to 1 200 USD, and then to as much as 2 500 USD. As a result of numerous protests of Afghan citizens demanding a reduction in the prices, the new government requested the Pakistani airlines to not overprice their services. Due to pressure exerted by the Taliban, Pakistan International Airlines has suspended flights to Kabul altogether. This suspension occurred on 14 October 2021, when the Taliban government ordered the airlines (the only international carrier regularly operating outside the Afghan capital) to lower the ticket prices to the level applicable prior to the collapse of the government (backed by the West) in August.

On 6 October 2021, the new government reopened the Passport Office in Kabul. The travel documents are issued in the first place to students and people requiring medical treatment abroad. According to the official data, about 170 000 people waited to collect their passport or to have their application processed. Since reopening of the Passport Office, more than 30 000 passports were issued during the first week<sup>77</sup>. Many Afghans need their passport in order to continue or complete the studies abroad. A large part of people have residence permits in other countries, to which they plan to go as soon as they receive the relevant document. At the end of October, the head of the Passport Office announced that technical issues will be resolved in other large provinces and that the distribution of passports will also commence there.

### **6.5. Postal services and telecommunication**

Until 15 August 2021, the Afghan Post Office operated effectively in Kabul, while having one central post office and several dozen city offices. In addition to basic services, it also

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<sup>76</sup> A flight from Kabul to Herat costs approximately 100 USD and takes half an hour. The journey to Herat by road takes over ten hours and costs about 15-20 USD.

<sup>77</sup> After opening of the Passport Office, about 4 000 - 4 500 passports were issued every day. The authorities plan to increase this number to as much as 6 000.

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allowed to send a parcel by air to any place abroad. The post office has its own website<sup>78</sup>, which is run in Dari and Pashto language, and to a limited extent in English.

The Afghan post office is mainly used to send and receive foreign parcels. Due to the lack of precise numbering of houses in some parts of the city, there is no service of delivering parcels to the indicated address. If someone expects to get a parcel, then he/she must personally go to the post office and pick it up there. Similarly, the country does not use the services of post office in order to deliver the official letters. In practice, the state institutions, such as courts, provide information and issue documents only in the case of personal contact. Therefore, the houses and flats do not have any mailboxes installed.

There has been a regulation in Afghanistann for several years now that requires the buyer of a SIM card to register and provide personal data. Moreover, one person cannot buy more than three SIM cards from one operator. However, in practice the residents do not comply with the above-mentioned regulation, nor with these limits. As it was mentioned before in this chapter, the telecommunication services are characterised by poor quality, therefore the users use several SIM cards and several operators, whose quality of service differs in various circumstances. Cost of the Internet is relatively high and it amounts to approx. 15 USD for 5 gigabytes, which are valid for 1 month. The telephones and the Internet are used in Afghanistann based on the top-up system and not based on the subscriptions.

5 telecommunication companies operate in Afghanistann and the number of their clients amounts to about 22 million, while 10 million of those clients use the Internet services<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> <https://afghanpost.gov.af/en>

<sup>79</sup> <https://tolonews.com/business-175098>

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