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4.2.2. Socio-economic conditions

COMMON ANALYSIS

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After the Taliban takeover, the existing economic and humanitarian crisis escalated, and the Afghan economy entered a stage of 'free fall' for months. The Afghan Central Bank's assets were frozen, aid delivery became increasingly complicated, and the economy contracted by close to 21 % in 2021, and by 6 % in 2022. In mid-2022 the Afghan economy started to stabilise and in 2023, there were some signs of a slight economic revival. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.1., pp. 45-46]

While Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, by April-June 2023, nominal wages had recovered to their pre-crisis levels and the real wages value was accentuated by the lower inflation and the subsequent deflation. The World Bank reported that this contributed to an improvement in household welfare, but also pointed out that poverty remained high and that the recent gains could be an effect of households exhausting all resources and coping strategies such as reducing the quality and quantity of food, getting into heavy debt, selling property, begging, marrying off girls, taking children out of school, child labour, and in extreme cases organ trafficking [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.2., pp. 47-49].

Food insecurity is widespread throughout the country that is currently on stage 4 out of 5 on the IPC, although the hunger situation has not been classified as a famine in Afghanistan. Food insecurity has particularly impacted households headed by persons with lower education, persons with disabilities, and women. Women's access to food has been negatively impacted due to restrictions on their freedom of movement, and limited job opportunities. Also, since the Taliban takeover, acute malnutrition has significantly affected children, resulting in increased hospitalisation of children under five years of age. Many children have also shown signs of psychosocial distress due to their families' economic hardship [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.3., pp. 50-52].

Women and female-headed households were particularly affected by the Taliban's policies of banning women from returning to their jobs or using public transport alone, requiring them to be accompanied by a close male relative when leaving the house, and observing a strict dress code. These policies did not only limit women's freedoms, but also affected their ability to work and make a living, driving them further into poverty [[KSEI 2022](#), 3.2., p. 26]. According to the World Bank's statistics, the average unemployment rate among women was 44.4 %. Moreover, women in urban areas, with a secondary or post-secondary education and who used to be employed in 2020, tended to be unemployed in 2022 due to Taliban restrictions on educated

women. Most women were engaged in tending livestock, working on farms, or running small-scale economic activities from home [[Country Focus 2023](#), 3.2., p. 48].

In March 2022, it was indicated that for female-households it is more challenging to access aid 'in the deeply conservative and patriarchal country', as it is, for example, quite difficult for women to access food distribution centres when they are already overcrowded with men [[KSEI 2022](#), 4.2., p. 35]. The decision by the Taliban to prohibit women in Balkh and Herat provinces access to public bath-houses (hammams) reportedly sparked outrage, as many households lacked the facilities and capacity to heat large quantities of water for washing and bathing at home [[KSEI 2022](#), 5.1., p. 40].

Women were also found to be particularly affected by inheritance issues because communities and families discriminate against their inheritance rights, while informal legal systems discriminate in the application of the relevant legal frameworks. Consequently, the affected households lived in permanently unstable conditions, making them 'particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation'. Such households needed further HLP assistance and cash for rent if they were threatened with eviction [[KSEI 2022](#), 5.2., p. 41].

Households in Helmand, Zabul, Nangarhar, Kabul and Ghor provinces were reportedly most affected by land-related issues, inheritance disputes, and access and use issues. It was noted that such disputes often arose when households were unable to pay their rent on time and subsequently faced harassment and eviction, or abusive practices (such as a sudden rent increase or demanding rent during the month) by their landlords. As most households did not have rental agreements, tenants were vulnerable to such practices [[KSEI 2022](#), 5.1., p. 41].

While conflict-induced displacement has decreased, economic hardship has become a driving force for internal movement figures. Moreover, there has reportedly been a great increase in the share of people being displaced due to disasters. Most of the IDPs who were displaced in 2021 and 2022 had relocated to the province of Kabul (23 %) followed by Herat (10 %) and Balkh (8 %) [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.3.1., p. 41]. In urban areas, many IDPs reportedly faced discrimination, lacked access to basic services and faced a permanent risk of being evicted from illegally occupied displacement sites [[KSEI 2022](#), 3.3., pp. 27-28].

UNHCR and IOM reported figures varying between 274 012 IDPs and 1 525 577 IDPs returning to their areas of origin in Afghanistan in 2022. However, economic hardship has been identified as a barrier for returning to IDPs' areas of origin [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.3.1., p. 41].

Forced evictions and displacement of minority groups, including Hazaras, Uzbeks and Tajiks, were reportedly facilitated or tolerated by the *de facto* authorities. At least 2 800 Hazara residents have been forcibly displaced from 15 villages in Daykundi and Uruzgan provinces in September 2021 alone. In December 2022, residents of Sar-e Pul Province, mostly Uzbeks and Tajiks, 'staged a protest against their forced eviction and the seizure of land' by the Taliban in 8 villages. They were reportedly 'threatened with a military response if they did not follow orders' [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.1., p. 83]. See also the [3.14. Ethnic and religious minorities](#) under the Refugee Status chapter.

Serious harm must take the form of conduct of an actor ([Article 6 QD](#)). In themselves, general poor socio-economic conditions are not considered to fall within the scope of inhuman or degrading treatment under Article 15(b) QD, unless there is intentional conduct of an actor.

When these socio-economic conditions are the result of an intentional conduct of an actor (e.g. forced evictions), these conditions may qualify under Article 15(b) QD in relation to Article 6 QD, following an individual assessment.

Such conditions may also increase the risk of persecution or other serious harm, such as child marriage or sale of children, where the actor requirement under Article 6 QD would also be met.

In some of those cases, a nexus to a reason for persecution may also be substantiated and refugee status may be granted instead.

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