1. Situation of the general population

1.1. Political context and international relations

The Taliban came to power on 15 August 2021 after ousting the previous US-backed government after 20 years of war.26 They declared the reestablishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA),27 previously in power in 1996–2001,28 and soon claimed to control the entire Afghan territory.29 Although they have met armed opposition by resistance groups and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP),30 the Taliban maintain territorial31 and effective control over Afghanistan32 – which brings responsibilities under international law.33

Soon after the takeover, the Taliban announced an all-male34 interim government35 which predominantly consisted of Pashtun Taliban members.36 The de facto government has largely remained in place,37 although there have been some reshuffles of de facto ministers.38 As the de facto head of state,39 the Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada enjoys absolute power and controls Afghanistan's political, administrative and religious structures,40 although this has been disputed by multiple de facto cabinet members.41 During a speech at the fourth anniversary of the Taliban takeover, on 15 August 2025, Akhundzada indicated that the de facto government had become permanent.42

In July 2025, Russia became the first and only country to recognise the Taliban's de facto government.43 Other countries have indicated that recognition is conditional,44 calling on the de facto government to be more 'inclusive' and respect women's and girls' rights.45 Over 100 persons within the de facto administration are under UN sanctions,46 and some are part of the Haqqani network47 (designated as a terrorist organisation by the UK,48 the US49 and the UN50). This complicates Afghanistan's international relations,51 and protracts its isolation.52 On 8 July 2025, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for the Taliban Supreme Leader and the de facto Chief Justice, Abdul Hakim Haqqani, on charges of 'gender persecution'. 53

Several states and international organisations have engaged with the de facto government, despite not recognising it,54 and diplomatic engagement has been increasing over the years.55 Some countries have been reopening their embassies in Kabul City,56 and many countries in the region have accepted Taliban-appointed attachés at Afghan embassies57 and have been conducting formal visits to Afghanistan.58 The UN59 and the EU have physical presence in the country, mainly to provide humanitarian aid.60 The US do not have diplomatic presence, but its interests in Afghanistan are formally represented by Qatar.61 In March 2025, Switzerland reopened an office in Kabul City for humanitarian aid62 and thus became the 'first Western country to re-establish on-the-ground presence' since the Taliban takeover.63 Some European

countries, including Norway and Germany, allow envoys of the de facto government to work at Afghan embassies and consulates.64 Germany has also been communicating with the de facto authorities ‘on a technical level’ to facilitate deportations of rejected asylum seekers.65

De facto officials have moreover been travelling to attend regional66 and international meetings.67 Despite being under sanctions, some individuals have been granted exceptions to travel for personal and official reasons, in more than ‘five dozen’ instances since August 2022, according to the American policy organisation George W. Bush Institute.68 The de facto authorities have also been invited to UN meetings on Afghanistan (‘Doha 3’ in 2024[69] and ‘Doha 4’ in 2025[70]) and the UN climate meeting COP29 (with observer status).71 The former government has however continued to represent Afghanistan at the UN,72 although the seat might be handed over to the de facto authorities under the UN ‘Mosaic plan’ for engagement with Afghanistan.73

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