

1.3. Prison conditions

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Human rights organisations do not have access to detention facilities in Afghanistan,437 but torture and other forms of ill-treatment are reportedly common practice at such sites.438 On 8 October 2024, however, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General visited the Pul-e Charkhi prison in Kabul City, and noted issues such as over-crowding, lack of access to legal aid for vulnerable detainees, including women, and prolonged pretrial detention. At the time (24 October 2024), the prison population stood at an unprecedented 26 000 people as per official data, including 1 900 women, 1 400 juveniles and 100 foreign nationals.439 Earlier, in the period 1 January 2022–31 July 2023, UNAMA documented over 1 600 human rights violations taking place during arrest and in detention facilities managed by the de facto Ministry of Interior (MoI), the de facto GDI and in provincial prisons managed by the de facto Office of Prison Administration. 50 % of cases were considered by UNAMA as acts of torture and other cruel, unhuman or degrading treatment, and 18 custodial deaths were recorded.440

In 2025, Rawadari published research based on testimonies of former detainees, and documented torture and other forms of ill-treatment being applied by de facto authorities, such as the de facto GDI, the de facto MoI, and the de facto Ministry of Defense (MoD). Various forms of ill-treatment inflicting severe physical and psychological pain were further documented, including beatings, waterboarding, electrocution, and sexual harassment of women detainees. Such abuses were used to extract confessions and information, intimidate, punish, and humiliate detainees, as well as to punish protesters and retaliate against former government employees – in particular those considered opponents or critics of the Taliban.441 Other sources have also reported on torture of detained persons,442 as well as rape and sexual violence, especially against detained women.443 Rawadari moreover reported on detainees being held in inadequate facilities, including ‘kindergartens, district administration buildings, containers, basements, and toilets’. Many facilities moreover lacked adequate ventilation and lighting as well as basic amenities for ‘cleanliness, sleeping, washing, and personal hygiene’. Some detainees only received water and bread during their detention.444 Rawadari noted a significant increase in arbitrary arrests. In the first six months of 2025, the organisation recorded 1 509 cases compared to 614 in the same period in 2024 and 222 in 2023.445

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