3.6. Focus on Kabul City

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Estimates of the number of inhabitants of Kabul City range from about five[1022] to six million people.[1023] The population has grown significantly since 2001,[1024] when it stood at about 500 000 people, as reported by AP.[1025] The city has, however, not been able to keep up with the pace of urbanisation as regards infrastructure development.[1026] According to UN-Habitat, reporting in 2025, 80 % of Kabul's urban population lived in informal settlements.[1027] The de facto authorities have initiated several infrastructure projects, including road construction.[1028] Many living on usurped land have seen their houses being demolished in such projects and have not been compensated for their loss of land and shelter. As a result, many have reportedly been pushed into homelessness.[1029] Meanwhile, AP reported on a 'boom' on the high-end real estate market in Kabul City, with increased demand for luxury homes due to the improved security situation following the Taliban takeover in 2021.[1030]

Kabul City is facing a water resource crisis due to plummeting groundwater levels. According to a report of the NGO Mercy Crops, the capital approaches a tipping point, where water extraction significantly exceeds the recharge of water resources. Moreover, Mercy Corps found that most of the limited groundwater available to the city population is dangerous to consume, with 80 % of the groundwater being contaminated by dangerously high levels of chemicals, sewage and toxins.[1031] The city might go dry by 2030, according to UNICEF.[1032]

Most residents of Kabul City rely on salaried jobs, day-wage labour, and small-scale trade to make a living. However, the city's labour market has been experiencing rising unemployment rates amid decreased job opportunities within the de facto government and a shrinking NGO sector resulting from aid cuts.[1033] The recent influx of returnees has further exacerbated the situation, intensifying competition for limited job openings,[1034] and securing casual labour has become increasingly difficult.[1035] According to data collected for Austrian Staatendokumentation in 2025, the monthly salary for entry-level employees with a university degree and three years' work experience was equivalent to EUR 250–450, depending on the position. Skilled daily-wage labourer earned an amount equivalent to EUR 10–14, and unskilled labourers typically earned EUR 4–5.[1036]

According to IPC, 1 282 624 people in Kabul City (25 % of the total urban population) experienced 'crisis' conditions in terms of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3) in March and April 2025. Over 2 million inhabitants (40 %) were experiencing 'stressed' conditions (IPC Phase 2).[1037] Amid rising food prices and loss of income,[1038] many households in Kabul City struggle to afford food,[1039] and in particular nutritious food.[1040] According to research carried out for

Staatendokumentation, the costs for a five-member household to meet their minimum daily requirement of bread, vegetables, and occasional protein exceeded the income of a daily-wage labourer by far.1041 Sources also reported on individuals relying on a stable salary income struggling to purchase more expensive food.1042

As mentioned, the influx of returnees to Kabul City has led to a significant increase in demand for housing, and rental prices have surged,1043 with rents more than doubling in some areas. 1044 According to data collected for the Austrian COI unit in 2025, 'the average rent for a three-room apartment in downtown Kabul' was about AFN 18 000 (EUR 230), while rents for similar apartments in the outskirts of the city were about AFN 10 000 (EUR 128).1045

Kabul City reportedly has the highest concentration of healthcare professionals in Afghanistan, 1046 including specialised physicians.1047 Moreover, in urban areas such as Kabul there are more hospitals and clinics offering a wider range and more advanced healthcare,1048 as well more private healthcare options.1049 However, healthcare facilities in the capital also experience staffing gaps,1050 supply shortages,1051 and cost barriers for patients.1052 In a survey carried out by IPSOS for the Austrian Staatendokumentation, 46 % of respondents in the cities of Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat indicated that they could access medication and 35 % had access to and could afford visiting a general practitioner. Meanwhile, 45 % of respondents indicated that they had access to medication but were unable to pay for it, and similarly 37 % had access to a general practitioner but could not pay for the service. 9 % had no access to medicines at all and 28 % had no access to primary healthcare.1053

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