

Country conditions in Afghanistan warrant TPS redesignation, extension

Conditions in Afghanistan have continued to deteriorate since the Taliban's violent return to power in August 2021 and the U.S. government's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) [designation](#) of the country in May 2022.

As the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Afghan American Foundation, and [more than 160 other organizations argued earlier this year](#), Afghanistan continues to meet the statutory requirements for TPS due to ongoing armed conflict and other extraordinary and temporary conditions that prevent safe and voluntary returns of Afghan nationals and stateless individuals last residing there to Afghanistan.

This brief is an inexhaustive summary of more recent reports on country conditions present in Afghanistan that justify an immediate redesignation and extension of TPS.

Ongoing armed conflict

As of June 23, 2023, the U.S. Department of State has [Afghanistan's travel advisory](#) at Level 4 due to armed conflict, civil unrest, crime, terrorism, and kidnapping.

Taliban authorities routinely commit violent abuses against former government officials and armed forces of the former Afghan government. A United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report [released on August 22, 2023](#), documented at least 800 instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment, or enforced disappearances carried out against individuals affiliated with the former government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). [The report](#) covered a period from August 15, 2021, to June 30, 2023.

ACLED, which tracks conflict-related data across the world, [recorded](#) more than 1,000 incidents of violence targeting civilians by the Taliban in the same period—accounting for 62 percent of all attacks on civilians in the country. ACLED notes these patterns place the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan among the world's worst government or *de facto* state perpetrators of violence targeting civilians domestically since August 2021, only behind the Tatmadaw military regime of Myanmar. In addition to former government and security officials, prisoners, women, and journalists were the most targeted groups of civilians for Taliban attacks, according to ACLED.

Civilians living in areas with armed non-state groups opposed to the Taliban have also been targeted through beatings, torture, and extrajudicial killings. [Amnesty International on June 7, 2023](#), published evidence of alleged human rights violations and instances of collective punishment by the Taliban in Panjshir, where the opposition National Resistance Front operates. Torture, ill treatment, extrajudicial executions, hostage taking,

the intentional burning of civilian homes, and other abuses have been documented against the civilian population in Panjshir province.

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) remain a significant concern in Afghanistan—characterized by a rise in attacks on places of worship and against the minority Hazara community, according to a UNAMA [report released on June 27, 2023](#). Suicide attacks carried out by the self-identified Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) group and other actors were the leading cause of IED-related civilian harm. The figures indicate “a significant increase in civilian harm resulting from IED attacks on places of worship compared to the three-year period prior to the Taliban takeover.”

There has also been an increase in casualties since August 2021 from unexploded and abandoned weapons. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has [recorded](#) that 640 children were killed or injured in 541 incidents involving landmine explosions and explosive remnants between January 2022 and June 2023.

In short, the August 2021 end of the war between the Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was not—by any means—an end to conflict and violence in the country. Instead, in many cases, threats to civilian harm have expanded and deepened since August 2021 and continue to make returns of Afghan nationals and other individuals to Afghanistan unsafe for the foreseeable future.

Other extraordinary and temporary conditions

Economic collapse and health concerns

The Afghan economy cratered in 2021 from the “unparalleled shock” of the Taliban takeover that left Afghanistan among one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the [Afghanistan Socio-Economic Outlook](#) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). While the country’s economic freefall from August 2021 stabilized to some degree, the Afghan economy “seems caught in a low-level equilibrium that leaves most Afghans poor, hungry, and in need of humanitarian assistance,” the U.S. Institute of Peace noted in [an August 10, 2023, report](#).

Two-thirds of Afghanistan’s population was expected to need urgent humanitarian assistance [in 2023](#). Through the country’s [revised Humanitarian Response Plan](#), humanitarian actors are aiming to provide 20 million people with humanitarian assistance between June and December 2023.

As with other crises, a funding gap threatens the humanitarian response. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) [noted on August 7, 2023](#), that only 23 percent of required funds for this year’s Humanitarian Response Plan have been received.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) [notes](#) the humanitarian crisis affects Afghans in both cities and remote areas—as “economic shocks have greatly diminished buying power, making many reliant on humanitarian aid.”

[Food insecurity](#) remains widespread in Afghanistan with roughly 17 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) or Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of acute food insecurity as of April of this year. [Households frequently struggle](#) to meet their basic needs and must resort to negative coping mechanisms such as skipping meals or reducing food consumption.

On top of other challenges, Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to shocks related to climate change. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [reports](#) that climate-related disasters in Afghanistan are “increasing in frequency, intensity, and severity, exposing millions of people to critical losses in livelihoods and assets.”

- With a population dependent on rain-fed agriculture, drought continues to be the most reported shock harming Afghan households, affecting the majority of the population and the country’s provinces. These conditions are worsening food insecurity, malnutrition, and infectious disease.
- Rising temperatures are diminishing access to water, which is contributing to increased disease outbreaks and driving displacement. Water sources from melting ice in mountainous areas have dried up, along with vegetation.
- Major swings in extreme weather conditions are also experienced in Afghanistan, with devastating unseasonal heavy rains and flooding in August 2022. Flooding events have been made worse in Afghanistan by large-scale deforestation.
- Land, pasture, and soil degradation result in the loss of livestock and livelihoods, worsening economic hardship for households across the country.

Afghanistan’s public health sector has been hard-pressed to maintain the capacity to respond to climate-related and other threats to public health. Disease outbreaks, such as acute watery diarrhea, [affect](#) vulnerable populations including children. As Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) [reiterated earlier this year](#), the Afghan public health system remains under-resourced and underfunded to adequately respond to the country’s medical needs driven by years of poverty, conflict, and humanitarian crisis.

Across sectors of the humanitarian response, Afghanistan remains an extremely challenging operating environment for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other humanitarian actors. This has been made significantly worse by various Taliban authority decrees and decisions, especially the December 24, 2022, decree that banned Afghan women from working for NGOs. These decrees have sparked widespread condemnation for strongly, negatively affecting “the daily lives of Afghans, the operating environment for humanitarian responders, and the modalities of aid deliveries,” according to an [ACAPS report](#) on the impact of Taliban directives in April 2023.

Human Rights Abuses and Repression

At every opportunity, the Taliban have continued an unrelenting campaign to systematically erase and exclude women and girls from nearly all aspects of public life. Girls and women in Afghanistan today are [denied education beyond the primary level](#),

banned from working outside the home in most sectors, and prohibited from accessing many public spaces—including, most recently, [beauty salons](#).

United Nations (UN) [experts](#) conclude the plight of women and girls in the country is considered “the worst globally” and amounts to “gender apartheid.” A June 15, 2023, [joint report](#) by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls detailed the scale of this “widespread and systematic discrimination.” The report noted the “relentless issuance” of more than 50 edicts between September 2021 and May 2023 restricting the rights of women and girls, “including their freedom of movement, attire and behavior, and their access to education, work, health, and justice.”

Women in Afghanistan told the visiting UN team that the “restrictive environment outside the home and economic pressures are resulting in significant tensions within the home, leading to domestic violence.” Experts note that the systematic discrimination against women and girls has normalized gender-based violence (GBV) against them. As previously mentioned, Afghan women are also frequently subject to harassment and violence by the Taliban authorities.

Previous human rights reports have noted state-directed discrimination and repression by the Taliban authorities against vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, including religious minorities such as [the Hazara](#) and [LGBTQIA+ Afghans](#). Events and threats of forced eviction [have also been reported in provinces across Afghanistan](#), “many of which targeted [internally displaced persons] in informal and semi-permanent settlements, ethnic minorities, families of the former government, or families of resistance fighters.” These patterns, often framed by the Taliban authorities as attempts to resolve alleged land disputes, have contributed to the lingering widespread rates of internal displacement within Afghanistan—which remain significant as socio-economic challenges such as poverty, debt, and food insecurity solidify as the main drivers of internal displacement instead of armed conflict as it had been for so many years in the country.

Conclusion

By numerous measures verified by non-governmental and multilateral sources, Afghanistan continues to experience dire country conditions due to ongoing armed conflict and other extraordinary and temporary conditions. In consultation with the Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security must redesignate and extend Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status. This decision should be reached as soon as possible to extend the protections of TPS to existing beneficiaries and to offer protections to newly arrived Afghan nationals in the United States.

USCRI and other organizations look forward to the administration making this determination expeditiously and proactively communicating relevant information to current and prospective beneficiaries through a timely Federal Register notice (FRN) and other efforts.