

Report

Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban



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For information on all of the reports published by Landinfo, please contact:

Landinfo
Country of Origin Information Centre

Storgata 33A

P.O. Box 8108 Dep

NO-0032 Oslo

Norway

Tel: +47 23 30 94 70

E-mail: landinfo@landinfo.no

Website: www.landinfo.no

SUMMARY

Taliban continues to be a primarily Pashtun movement. However, recruitment of non-Pashtuns has increased during the last decade.

The conflict pattern in Afghanistan has changed since the transition in 2014, and Taliban has since maintained focus on establishing a more professional military organisation. This has consequences for recruitment, both in respect to the profile of those who are recruited, and in regards the training of recruits. Religion and the idea of jihad continues to play an important role in recruitment, and so do economic circumstances. The cultural and socioeconomic environment impose restrictions on most Afghans, of which many have no other choice than to join the Taliban.

Cases of forced recruitment have been documented, but are exceptional. Recruitment to Taliban is not characterized by coercion, threats and violence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Taliban has influenced developments in Afghanistan in two periods; in the period before 2001 and in the period after 2001. In the first period from 1994 to 2001, the network was in position for a long period of time and defined itself as national authority. In the period after 2001, Taliban, together with the Haqqani network, Hizb-e-Islami, al-Qaeda, Daesh and other local and foreign groups, has represented the armed opposition to the regime in Kabul.

This report is limited to describing the Taliban network's recruitment of military cadres, with a main focus on recent times, i.e. after 2001. The intention is not to provide an exhaustive picture of the recruitment, but to present information and perspectives relevant to issues handled by the immigration authorities. First, an account is given of changes to the conflict pattern in Afghanistan after 2014, highlighting the question of how this has affected Taliban's recruitment pattern – both in regards who is being recruited and how recruitment takes place. Two key issues raised in the last chapters of the report are whether the Taliban recruits by using threats and coercion and the extent to which minors are mobilised. The report is an update and extension of a Landinfo query response from 2012; *Afghanistan: Rekruttering til Taliban* (Landinfo 2012).

The report is mainly based on open and publicly available sources, as well as information obtained by Landinfo during several visits to Afghanistan, most recently in April/May 2017. Several of the oral sources are kept anonymous and are neither referred to by name nor by organisational affiliation. This is mainly done at the sources' own request and primarily to safeguard their security.

It is challenging to obtain accurate and up-to-date information about matters related to the military conflict in Afghanistan. It is particularly demanding to access reliable information about the armed opposition, in this context Taliban. The same applies to topics related to recruitment practices. There is a limited amount of sources, little opportunity for contact with primary sources, and information and assessments from secondary sources are not necessarily fact-based and are hard to verify.

Critical review of the expertise, objectivity and working methods of sources is central to Landinfo's work. So is the assessment of the relevance, quality and credibility of the information. Many sources have an agenda and strategic interest in distorting information and/or they have dubious loyalty ties to one of the parties in the conflict, their extended family, tribe and clan. The same is true for persons suspected or accused of fighting for the Taliban and who are imprisoned or in detention camps. In such cases, for example, it may be opportune for them to claim that they have been forcefully recruited. The topics in this report are of such a nature that it is obvious that the sources' standpoints and experience will affect the information and the views they convey.

2. CONFLICT PATTERN

The Afghan state appears weak and fragmented. Large segments of the population have little confidence in the authorities and are of the opinion that the authorities do not provide services or rule of law and are not able to protect the population. The attack at the military hospital in Kabul in March 2017 and on the military camp Camp Shaheen outside the city of Mazar-e Sharif a few weeks later resulted in major loss of security personnel. People wonder how the security forces can defend the country when they are not even able to protect themselves and their own. Widespread corruption contributes to further deterioration of public confidence in the authorities.

Today the Taliban is the offensive force, while the Afghan security forces appear weak, defensive and not proactive. In many parts of the country, groups of tenfold of Taliban fighters are visible on the road network, in rural areas and in some district centres, without encountering significant resistance (conversation with international organisation in Kabul in April 2017).

The political culture in Afghanistan is characterised by pragmatism and shifting alliances. It is accepted practice to change side and make alliances with the party who at any given time appears to be the strongest actor and whom it is most opportune to be an ally with. As Taliban is on the offensive, the Afghan instinct to form alliances could now cause more persons to join the Taliban.

2.1 CHANGES TO CONFLICT PATTERN SINCE DECEMBER 2014

Since the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operation was terminated in December 2014, the conflict in the country has changed character. While the ISAF Force was clearly a militarily superior opponent, the Taliban considers that the Afghan authorities and security forces (ANSF¹) are a more evenly matched enemy. The risk involved in armed resistance against official and government forces is now considered to be smaller. The international forces were well trained, had advanced military equipment and were a very strong military opponent (conversation with UN source A in Kabul, April 2016).

While the Taliban previously used guerrilla warfare with widespread use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the conflict pattern has now changed to more conventional warfare between the parties. There are reports of frequent regular battles for the purpose of territorial control. The Taliban directly attacks the ANSF, and there has been a big increase in ground combat incidents and direct encounters between the Taliban and the security forces. In addition, the Taliban carry out complex, targeted offensive operations against densely populated areas and district centres. In such operations, up to hundreds of Taliban fighters may participate. In the autumn of 2015, the Taliban managed to gain control of the provincial capital of Kunduz, one of the country's largest cities. Although they maintained control for a few days only, it was a formidable victory and a morale «boost» for the new strategy. Several provincial capitals, including in Laghman, Helmand and Faryab, have come close to falling to the Taliban (interview with international organisation in Kabul, April 2017).

¹ Afghanistan National Security Forces.

The Taliban has increased its presence in much of the country and has gained expanded territorial control. As of June 2017, the Taliban controls several district centres in different parts of the country, including in areas where the population are not Pashtun. An example of the extension of control is the province of Badakshan, where the majority of the population is Tajik. The Taliban never gained control in this province when they held central power in the country. Today, on the other hand, the Taliban has full control in two of the province's districts; Yamgan and Warduj (interview with international organisation; local think tank, April 2017).

A well-informed international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2017) claimed in spring 2017 that about half of the country is either under Taliban control or is contested, in other words, is threatened by the Taliban.

Conflict dynamics are also altered by Daesh having established itself as an actor in Afghanistan. The core conception of Daesh is sectarian, and that also applies to the groups in Afghanistan that have sworn allegiance to the movement. Daesh has carried out several attacks on Afghan soil directly against the Shia-Muslim population (BBC News 2017). Thus Daesh is a common enemy of the Taliban and the Hazara population, who have a mutual interest in fighting Daesh. This may be a contributing factor and explanation for the improved relationship between Hazaras and Taliban. A local analyst pointed out in conversation with Landinfo (May 2017) that in the recent past, negotiations between Hazaras and Taliban have become more frequent. Often this involves cooperation agreements or agreements not to attack or pose a threat to each other. Taliban is allowed to travel through Hazara areas, while Taliban abstains from stopping Hazaras at roadblocks or otherwise.

2.1.1 International forces

The International Combat Force ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) concluded its mission in Afghanistan in December 2014. There is, however, still an international military presence in the country, but on a smaller scale and with a different mandate. Resolute Support (RS) is a force of about 13,000 persons. RS is not a regular combat force, but a non-combatant operation which by its mandate is primarily intended to conduct training and consultancy for the Afghan security forces. In addition, the United States has special forces in the country, which conduct anti-terrorist operations (UN source, conversation, May 2017).

Because the conflict in the country has intensified in the recent past, however, the international forces have to a greater extent again become active warring parties, both on the ground and in the air. In the last few months there have been a series of air attacks on high-ranking Taliban commanders, and the shadow governors² in the northeast provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan and Takhar were killed during spring 2017. In conversation with Landinfo, an international source pointed out (April 2017) that the international forces have carried out air attacks in many parts of the country. Several hundred international soldiers, mostly US special soldiers, are stationed in the particularly vulnerable Helmand province.

Against this background, the international forces have yet again become a central theme in Taliban propaganda and rhetoric. On 28 April 2017 they announced the

² The Taliban leadership has set up shadow authorities at provincial level. The shadow governor is the Taliban's supreme representative in a province.

spring offensive for the year, Operation Mansouri. The international the forces are mentioned specifically:

The main focus of Operation Mansouri will be on foreign forces, their military and intelligence infrastructure and in eliminating their internal mercenary apparatus (Jihadology 2017).

3. WHO ARE RECRUITED TO TALIBAN?

The changes to the conflict pattern has influenced recruitment to the Taliban, both in regards the profile of those recruited and for which training the recruits undergo. The profile has changed as it now concerns personnel who will be in direct conflict with the enemy. That is why there is much to suggest that Taliban, more actively than before, is trying to recruit personnel with a military background and/or military skills. Personnel from the Afghan security forces have such expertise, and several sources have indicated that Taliban actively try to get them to change side. With greater emphasis on military knowledge and experience, the likely average age of those recruited has also risen (conversation with an international organisation in Kabul; conversation with a think tank in Kabul, April/May 2017).

As the Taliban controls significant areas, including in Helmand Province where they are assumed to control 80 percent of the territory, Taliban recruits are to a greater extent than previously being trained on Afghan soil. According to Landinfo's source, Taliban now has training camps in many parts of the country (conversation with an international organisation in Kabul, April 2017). Taliban has confirmed this in an article in the Long War Journal: in addition to the camps in the south, there are training camps in the north (Kunduz, Faryab and Jawzjan) and in the east (Kunar and Paktika) (Roggio 2016).

Taliban, like the Afghan security forces, lose many men on the battlefield and in other armed activity. So far, from a recruitment perspective, the losses do not seem to represent a problem for the Taliban, and the movement does not seem to have problems with access to recruits. This contrasts with what the Afghan security forces are experiencing. A well-informed source emphasised, in a meeting with Landinfo, that the weaker the state and the authorities appear, and the less confidence the population has in the state-building project, the easier it will be for the Taliban to recruit (conversation with international organisation in Kabul in April 2017). The political culture is characterised by pragmatism and assessments of whom it is at any given time most opportune to be an ally with and this could also have contributed to the fact that the threshold for joining Taliban has now become lower.

3.1 FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME FIGHTERS, LOCAL AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS

The renowned Afghanistan expert Antonio Giustozzi (conversation in Oslo, November 2015) maintains that there are two groups with different loyalty ties to Taliban and the organisation's core values: «part-time and full-time fighters». Among the part-time insurgents, loyalty to local warlords and tribal elders is dominant and the group is only to a small extent exposed to indoctrination. Among the full-time fighters

– the elite forces and the professional fighters, many of whom are recruited from madrassas – loyalty to the Taliban and the conviction of *jihad* is strong. Professional full-time fighters now play a greater role than before.

Several of Landinfo’s interlocutors (meetings in Kabul 2016) believed that soldiers in local Taliban groups combine the soldier role with civil occupations, most often in agriculture. For major offensives, local cadres are mobilised (Amiri 2016). Their primary activity is to support the professional Taliban forces operating in their area. To what extent they act as Taliban in the periods when professional troops are not present is likely to vary significantly and depends on the extent to which they are subject to military challenge. Many of the cadres live at home; they «fight for a couple of hours in the morning» and then go home for other activities – «in the field or in the bazaar» (conversation with a national NGO, Kabul 2016). They are often subordinated to larger groups at district level, which in turn have affiliation to leaders at provincial or national level (Giustozzi 2010, p. 5). Members are recruited personally by the commanders on the basis of their relationship, reputation and position.

In conversation with Landinfo, an NGO used the terms *soft* and *hard* Taliban; of which the former are locals from a given area. There can be close connections between village elders and the Taliban. Some of the elders have joined the Taliban. Others may have close relatives, such as sons or nephews, who have joined, which makes it easy for the elders to negotiate with Taliban. The *hard* Taliban fight in areas which they do not come from, which can make negotiations with the locals more demanding, but, also they respect the elders (NGO A, conversation in Kabul, May 2017).

Taliban is a largely «decentralised» organisation, consisting of relatively small groups around local commanders. They cooperate primarily on the basis of personal relationships. There is reason to assume that recruitment (mobilisation) of local part-time insurgents happens in accordance with local traditions and loyalty ties, in contrast to the recruitment of full-time fighters and elite forces, which to a greater extent is organised by the Taliban. The Norwegian journalist Anders Sømme Hammer in collaboration with the Danish author Carsten Jensen has written books on the international mission in Afghanistan. Hammer and Jensen show how local regimes are independent of alliances: «Irrespective of who is the ruler in the village, the Taliban or the government of Kabul, it is Mehman Shah who incarnates acting power» (Hammer & Jensen 2016, p. 55). Journalist Abubakar Siddique (2014) points out that friendship networks, «[...] or *andiwali* (Pashto for camaraderie), often play an important role in attracting recruits, maintaining group solidarity and contributing to the authority of some Taliban figures».

Several of Landinfo’s interlocutors considered that Taliban has changed its approach to religious practice, traditions and social life in areas where the locals (tribal elders) are allied with the organisation. The approach is softer, and creates room for making decisions in line with the religious and ideological climate in the area in question. Taliban is dependent on hospitality, support and sympathy to gain foothold in an area, which explains why the Taliban still has only minimal presence in the Hazara-dominated areas of the central highlands.³ One analyst (May 2017) put this as follows:

³ Taliban has no foothold in the Hazara dominated areas, because the population does not support the Taliban’s vision and the objective of Afghanistan as an independent sharia-based emirate. The limited presence is also explained by the fact that the Hazaras are well organised and take care of their own security, in addition to the fact that the area has little strategic value for Taliban (see, for example,

«Because they want to expand their influence, they are trying to be very close and very soft with people». For example, a journalist (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) maintained that there are different practices between districts in Nangarhar, where the local Taliban is powerful, when it comes to girls' opportunity to go to school. The practice is adjusted to the local culture. It is reasonable to assume that recruitment to the local Taliban largely occurs in accordance with what has been and continues to be the local traditions for recruitment to armed groups.

3.2 TALIBAN ELITE FORCES

In the years following 2014, Taliban has established elite forces and developed more specialist and professional military forces. These were strategies developed under the late Mullah Mansour's leadership. A reputable local analyst has described Mansour as a strategic and visionary leader (conversation in Kabul, May 2017).

The elite forces are called the Red Brigade (Quet'a). The analyst claimed in a conversation with Landinfo that they were dedicated combatants with good fighting morale. They are more ideologically and religiously dedicated than other Taliban fighters, they are better equipped and have sophisticated weapons, and they are well-trained. Equipment and weapons often come from defeated or killed security forces, or from security personnel who have changed side. The forces are primarily trained in Afghanistan; for example, a number of training camps are said to be located in the district Gereshk in Helmand (Amiry 2016).

Soldiers in the elite forces also have better salaries, and the forces are generally better financed than other Taliban cadres. Originally, the forces were introduced in Helmand. Based on the successful operations there, they are now also used in other parts of the country, but primarily in contested areas. They have also participated in offensive operations in, among others, Kunduz, Kandahar and Zabul (Amiry 2016).

The forces are mobile and go to where the Taliban has planned major operations. The units consist of groups of up to 220 men, with subgroups of 20 cadres operating together (Amiri 2016). They can gather forces during a single night and move quickly between districts and provinces. According to a local employee of an NGO (NGO B, conversation in Kabul, May 2017), they are very well organised and are under the direct command of the Quetta Shura. They are therefore not subject to the Taliban shadow structure at provincial and district level.

These mobile elite forces reduce the need to recruit fighters locally (EASO 2016, p. 22). At the same time, Giustozzi (as cited in EASO 2016, p. 16) points out that some of the best local fighters are offered to join the elite forces, thus building their own career and getting better pay. Further, Giustozzi claims that most of the elite forces are recruited in Pakistan.

In addition, Taliban has established a special unit for suicide bombers. Suicide attacks are resource-intensive and Taliban invests a lot in such attacks. It is therefore strongly emphasised that those recruited for suicide assignments have to be trusted. The training will help to provide the suicide bombers with sufficient mental strength to carry out the planned attacks. Religious and ideological conviction is particularly important for those who are chosen for such assignments. Suicide bombers are important in complex,

Landinfo 2015, p. 7).

coordinated attacks in, for example Kabul city; the suicide bomber paves the way for sharpshooters in connection with such attacks (conversation with analyst in Kabul, May 2017).

3.3 ETHNICITY AND GEOGRAPHIC AFFILIATION

Information on the number and ethnic and geographic affiliation of the Taliban cadres is based on estimates. As Landinfo understands it, Taliban is still predominantly a Pashtun phenomenon, both in actual and relative numbers. The majority are Pashtuns, though the Taliban claims that ethnicity, tribe and region are irrelevant.

Giustozzi estimated in 2012 that less than 10% of the Taliban's cadres are Uzbek, Tajik or of some other origin (Giustozzi 2012). By 2015, Giustozzi considered that the proportion of non-Pashtuns in Taliban was increasing (seminar in Oslo, November 2015). Analysts Patricia Grossmann and Kate Clark (as cited in EASO 2016) have pointed out that recruitment from other ethnic groups is less common, while Boran Osman of the Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN) has stated that it is primarily local factors («local dynamics of the conflict») which are crucial, and that both Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmen are recruited (EASO 2016, p. 18).

According to a local analyst (conversation in Kabul, May 2017), the Taliban leadership in 2008 prepared a conscious strategy to develop the Taliban in the direction of a more multiethnic movement. The reason for the strategy was that Taliban wanted to present a new image of the movement; an image with a wider embrace and which can appear as an alternative for persons other than Pashtuns from the south. In this context there has been an attempt by Taliban to recruit non-Pashtuns from different parts of the country. For example, they have recruited Tajiks in the northeast while recruiting Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, etc. in the north and northwest. The strategy also includes recruitment to the leadership of the shadow administrations in the non-Pashtun provinces. Thus, the Taliban has succeeded in establishing leadership in these areas through local anchoring and understanding of local political dynamics, culture and language. According to the local analyst, this has provided Taliban with an advantage in convincing persons to support them. Hence, in many areas the local balance of power has shifted in favour of the Taliban.

Giustozzi has previously pointed out (Giustozzi 2011, p. 11) that Taliban has a minimal support amongst the Hazara population. An insignificant number of Hazaras are mobilised, and only a very few Hazara commanders are allied with the Taliban. In the central Hazara dominated areas, including the Hazara districts west of Ghazni, there are no reasons to assume extensive recruitment at the individual level. Still, there are only a few Hazaras actively fighting for Taliban (conversation with analyst in Kabul, May 2017). The analyst Osman (as cited in EASO, p. 20) points out that it is important for Taliban to rely on recruits. In view of that, Osman thought it unlikely that Taliban would force Hazaras to fight with them.

The vast majority of Taliban fighters are Afghans, and the numbers of foreign fighters (i.e. Uzbek, Arab, Chechen, etc.) are very limited. The message from the movement is clear; the Taliban has a national agenda; they do not subscribe to the vision of a caliph or global jihad. They do not want to appear as a threat to neighbouring countries. They have no known connections to Al Qaeda, Daesh or other militant groups with global jihad on the agenda (conversation with analyst in Kabul, May 2017).

4. HOW DOES TALIBAN RECRUIT?

There is relative consensus on how recruitment to the armed forces takes place; mainly through established traditional networks and organised activities related to religious institutions. The Taliban's Code of Conduct, *Layha* (Clark 2011), contains several provisions that deal with different forms of invitation,⁴ and provisions on how cadres should behave to engage and create sympathy. One of the specialist committees under the Quetta Shura is responsible for recruitment.

Some years ago, everything from pamphlets, DVDs and magazines to radio, telephone and web-based dissemination were important tools in the propaganda apparatus (ICG 2008, p.ii). Internet and social media, such as Twitter, blogs and Facebook, have in recent years turned out to be very important venues and channels for spreading the movement's message, and are also a recruitment tool. Through social media the Taliban can make contact with sympathisers and potential recruits. Taliban, according to journalist Bashir Ahmad Gwakh (2011) on Radio Free Europe, has understood that no war can be won without social media. It has built up an extensive communication and media network for propaganda and recruitment (EASO 2016, p.17).

In addition, Taliban makes personal and direct attempts to convince people to support the movement's ideology and worldview. Much of this activity is conducted through religious networks. This may be in the mosque in connection with Friday prayers, or other local events or arenas (conversation with local think tank, April 2016). A large apparatus of political agents and facilitators work with recruitment in mosques and madrassas, often in Pakistan (conversation with Giustozzi in Oslo, November 2015), but there are also a number of reports of madrassas as a central recruitment arena in Afghanistan (EASO 2016, page 17).

Afghans in Pakistan have been under severe pressure in the last few years. Refugee camps have traditionally been an important arena for recruitment to the Taliban. Many of the camps have been closed in recent years. Both registered and unregistered Afghans feel less welcome than before, both by the people and the authorities. More than 600,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan during the last half of 2016 (email from diplomatic source, 8 February 2017). Landinfo is not familiar with sources who can highlight whether this has affected the Taliban recruitment pattern in Pakistan, or to what extent people who have returned to Afghanistan join the Taliban or other militant insurgent groups.

4.1 EXPLANATORY MODELS FOR WHY PERSONS JOIN TALIBAN

There are various explanatory models for why so many people join the Taliban. Two main models are predominant:

- One model emphasises **material and economic conditions**; the recruits are motivated by poverty, lack of other opportunities and the fact that the Taliban offers relatively good salaries.
- The other model emphasises **religious and cultural conditions**. The notion of the authorities' and the international community's lack of respect for Islam and traditional standards is central.

⁴ Measures aimed at acquiring supporters, both political and military.

Professor Peter Bergen at Arizona State University and scientist Matt Waldman at Harvard University describe the difference between the two models in this way:

For those who were unemployed and destitute, the insurgency offered status, a sense of purpose and an “honorable” way for them to feed their families; while for those educated in hard-line madrassas, the jihad was a religious duty (Bergen & Waldman 2014, p. 3).

Motives may be overlapping, and it is not necessarily the case that economic motivations do not apply also to religiously convinced recruits. Probably the elite forces score high on both parameters.

Sources emphasise religion and ideology to different degrees. Some, such as former advisor to the U.S. Special Operations Command in Afghanistan, Seth G. Jones, indicated in 2008 that it was almost only Taliban’s leadership and key commanders who were motivated by Islam, and who considered the uprising to be a struggle against the Western presence and the «puppet government» in Kabul. Most cadres, «the bottom tier of the Taliban», were motivated by economics and frustration (Jones 2008). Giustozzi also describes two groups that differ in terms of religion and ideology. He argues that among one group – «the full-time fighters» – there are several who have «loyalty to the Taliban as such regarding the cause of jihad seems to be stronger». He considers that very many of the professional full-time fighters are truly convinced of jihad (Giustozzi 2010).

4.1.1 Material and economic conditions

Taliban has strengthened its position in Afghanistan, and has sympathy both among individuals and groups. Many are young disillusioned men, motivated by a combination of vengeance, a wish to become heroes, and religious and economic reasons. They do not necessarily subscribe to Taliban’s core values. Many have lost faith in the state-building project and the idea that it is possible to create a safe and stable Afghanistan. Many join the insurgents out of anger and frustration at abuse against civilians. Poverty, hopelessness and lack of future prospects are central explanations for why many ultimately turn to the Taliban (conversation with NGO A in Kabul, May 2017).

The international state-building project in Afghanistan has not changed the socioeconomic realities for broad segments of the population. Already in 2011 the popular view was relative unambiguous: «[...] in the eyes of the Afghan people, the international effort has brought little improvement in their lives» (The Asia Foundation 2012). Several economic indicators are pointing in the wrong direction, as is the development in the security situation. Popular pessimism and lack of confidence in the future is prominent and pronounced (Asia Foundation 2016, p. 6).

Institute for War and Peace Reporting (as cited in EASO 2012, p. 27) has previously pointed out that «[...] according to some estimates, up to 70% of young Taliban fighters in Afghanistan fight for money and not for ideology». Representatives of the authorities also often provide explanations that emphasise economic and material goods rather than convictions:

NDS⁵ Officials inform that insurgents are offering different incentives to the youngsters who choose to join their lines including cars, money and weapons (Accord 2014).

There is widespread consensus that the international military presence before 2014 generated many jobs. An NGO (conversation in Kabul in April 2016) considered that nearly half a million jobs had been lost since the transition. The general economic and material conditions are an incentive for recruitment, while also contributing to various forms of pressure to join the Taliban.

For young people, especially in rural areas, the options are very limited and there are few possible sources of income. Many have minimal schooling and little resources. In order to earn income, they have the choice of joining the Taliban or the security forces. In some parts of the country, especially in conservative areas in rural areas, supporting the authorities may not be an alternative, because the authorities are perceived to be out of tune with the population (conversation with NGO A in Kabul, May 2017).

The social status of being associated with the Taliban is in some environments considerable higher than that of being in the security forces. In addition, it is known that salary payments to personnel in the security forces are irregular; months can pass between each payment and casualty numbers are high. It is not certain that a soldier in the security forces who has fallen in service can be buried in his home town, because the local mullah may not agree to arranging the funeral. If a Taliban member dies, on the other hand, he will be hailed as a martyr (conversation with local NGO, April 2016).

It is a general perception that officers in the security forces are corrupt. A local employee in an NGO (NGO B, Conversation in Kabul, May 2017) reported that the recruits in the security forces experience that their superiors are selling weapons and ammunition to the Taliban. Corruption theoretician Sarah Chayes (Hammer & Jensen 2016, p. 318) has stated that people's endorsement of Taliban is not due to religious radicalisation, but moreover it reflects the discontent over corruption and mismanagement. Chayes thinks that this helps to explain the appeal of Taliban.

In a context where politics in most contexts revolves around alliances and power, the fact that the Taliban has strengthened its position is a recruitment advantage; to be an ally with the strong or the party growing in strength is, as previously mentioned, the ideal (Hammer & Jensen, 2014, p. 32).

If an alliance with the Taliban – in addition – can provide individuals, groups and communities with income opportunities, this will probably increase the likelihood that such an alliance will be established. In the case of criminal groups, economic and interest-related motives permeate their cooperation with the Taliban. Taliban is in a position that means that the organisation can provide protection of, among other things, smuggling routes. For example, it is known that opium farmers in Helmand support Taliban in return for Taliban's protection of the business and smuggling routes (conversation with NGO B in Kabul, May 2017).

Taliban is weakest in the large cities. However, analyst Boran Osman (as cited in EASO 2016) has pointed out that Taliban sympathisers openly engage in propaganda at several universities, including in Nangarhar, Khost, Kabul and Kandahar. The

⁵ The National Directorate of Security (NDS) is the Afghan security service.

organisation recruits from among newly arrived young people with weak networks (Giustozzi 2012, p. 60).

4.1.1.1 Salary and other remunerations

It is unclear how the Taliban remunerates and what the cadres earn. There is much to suggest that conditions vary, but it nevertheless seems to be a consensus that conditions are relatively good. A diplomat (conversation in Kabul, 2013) claimed that the Taliban paid 8-10 USD per day, but stressed that many are engaged part-time only, and combine working for Taliban with work in agricultural or bazaar jobs. A representative of an international NGO (conversation in Kabul, October 2013) reckoned that Taliban paid 10-15 USD per day, while NGOs pay only 3-4 USD for a day's work. Another employee of a local NGO (meeting in Kabul, April 2016) claimed that Taliban paid up to 300 USD per month, but stressed, like the other sources, that the salary level is unstable and that the work is seasonal and situation-dependent.

In addition to remuneration in the form of wages, the Taliban fighters also have other sources of income. The provisions of Layha govern the cadres' handling of economic assets. Landinfo interprets the provisions as an acknowledgment that representatives of the Taliban «unlawfully» acquire assets, for example through roadside checks. Layha, §§ 27-33, establishes war exchanges as a «legitimate» source of income for both insurgents and civilians. According to § 27, war exchanges are not exclusively given to the organisation:

[...] four-fifths [...] shall be given to those mujahedin who were on the frontline, and those who were sent by their leader to ambush or provide information for the fight and to those who were sent anywhere else for any good reason (Clark 2011).

An NGO (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) asserted that the provisions of Layha are put into practice. The source claimed that ransom from kidnappings and «road charges» went to the cadres in agreed proportions.

4.1.2 Religious and cultural conditions

In addition to the experience of injustice and opposition to government and international forces, religious, ideological and political motivation has always played an important role to recruitment (Ladbury 2009, pp. 4-6; Mercy Corps 2016).

According to Giustozzi (conversation in Oslo, November 2015), religious and family responsibilities play a prominent role for those who join the organisation as full-time fighters. Giustozzi has claimed that more and more of the recruits are driven by ideological/religious motives, and, as mentioned earlier, an extensive propaganda apparatus has been established in and around the madrassas. He further points out that family networks play a crucial role. There are clear expectations in Afghan circles in Pakistan that all families must provide men to fight the regime in Kabul. The political mood contributes to the fact that many families are strategically interested in some of their young men joining Taliban. Borhan Osman (as cited in EASO 2016, p. 21) confirmed in August 2016 that ideology «is an important driver for young men».

There is widespread dissatisfaction with how the international and Afghan security forces operate. The way the forces operate is often in breach of key traditional norms, for example, the ISAF forces conducted a series of house searches in private homes

with body searches of both women and men, which is unheard of and violates basic principles of Afghan culture (see, for example, Landinfo 2012, p. 2). This is actively used in Taliban's propaganda. Taliban, for its part, presents a worldview adapted to the norms and culture of the Afghan society.

Many Afghans, especially in rural areas, look to Taliban as a protector, both in the short and the long term. The protection provided by the Taliban is an important incentive for joining the movement. Militias, local persons and commanders have plenty of room for manoeuvre in Afghanistan, and crime and abuse by such groups and persons affect the daily lives of many Afghans. An analyst claimed in a conversation with Landinfo (Kabul, May 2017) that the government-friendly militias in the Northeast (including the Afghan Local Police/ALP) are particularly brutal and are responsible for widespread abuse of civilians. There is great fear of such militias in the population, and according to the analyst, the need and desire for protection against the militia is a key motive for joining the Taliban in the northeastern provinces. This could be a contributing factor to the fact that Taliban has gained a strong foothold in this region.

Madrassas are an important recruitment base for the ideologically dedicated, both adults and minors. Although the Taliban has gained a significantly better foothold in Afghanistan in recent years, Giustozzi (as cited in EASO 2016, p. 25) has pointed out that madrassas and refugee camps in Pakistan are still an important recruitment arena (EASO 2016). At the same time, it must be emphasised that religious teaching in mosques is very prevalent and most people do not become militant insurgents.

An international source who follows developments in the security situation closely (Kabul, interview April 2017) considered that recruitment is now taking place more often in Afghanistan than what was the case in the past. The reason is that Taliban has more freedom of movement than before and controls relatively large areas.

5. VOLUNTARINESS AND COERCION

Voluntariness versus coercion can be assessed according to various legal and moral standards and parameters. For example, the UN (UN B, conversation in Kabul in 2016) appears to think that there is coercion when the international age limits for mobilisation to armed forces are broken.

UNHCR, as Landinfo understands the organisation, also has a relatively broad understanding of coercion in relation to recruitment to armed forces (Taliban) in Afghanistan. Commenting on an EASO report in 2012, it is stated that

The report does not include in this definition Taliban recruitment mechanisms based on broader coercive strategies, including fear, intimidation and the use of tribal mechanisms to pressurize individuals into joining the Taliban. The report's conclusion that forced recruitment is the exception rather than the rule should therefore not be taken to apply to these other forms of coercive recruitment (UNHCR 2012).

Hence, sources understand forced recruitment differently and categorise information about recruitment differently.⁶ The quotation above illustrates how different starting points lead to diametrically different conclusions. It is unclear to Landinfo what is implied in the term «broader coercive strategies», especially because fear (assumed to be subjective) and tribal mechanisms (assumed traditional and accepted rules of the game, solution methods and modus operandi) are included in the term together with «intimidation». UNHCR's reference to «tribal mechanisms» is not linked to specific age groups and applies to everyone who joins the Taliban. Landinfo considers that it may be difficult to operationalise the pressure that lies in cultural practices and customs in a society built on traditional law.

Landinfo's understanding of coercion when it comes to recruitment, is that a person who resists mobilisation may be subjected to specific coercive measures and abuse (usually physical punishment) by the person who is recruiting.⁷ The coercive measures and abuse may also involve other serious measures and be directed against others, such as family members of the target.

There may be a gradual transition between direct, concrete and structural coercion, and within this range it may only make limited sense to talk about voluntariness, precisely because the alternative options for the individual are most limited. Even if individuals are not subjected to threats or physical abuse, factors such as poverty, cultural conditions and marginalisation may obscure the distinction between voluntary and forced participation.

Some sources, including the UNHCR, are of the opinion that the Taliban recruits by coercion. In the UNHCR Recommendations for asylum countries of April 2016, *Eligibility Guidelines for assessing the international protection needs of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan*, the following is stated:

In areas where AGEs⁸ exercise effective control over territory and the population, they are reported to use a variety of mechanisms to recruit fighters, including recruitment mechanisms based on coercive strategies. Persons who resist recruitment, and their family members, are reportedly at risk of being killed or punished (UNHCR 2016, p. 45).

The claims are geographically delimited to «areas where AGEs exercise effective control over the territory and population». It is therefore difficult to know which areas UNHCR is referring to and whether the claim is valid only for such areas. Landinfo would also point out that UNHCR, by using the terms «reported» and «reportedly», seems to distance themselves from the validity of the substance in the documentation.

The allegations of coercion are substantiated by references to documentation from both UNHCR itself, news media, the Afghan authorities and other international

⁶ Forced recruitment can be said to have its legal variant in mandatory military service; the main difference is that the «assault» – such as deprivation of liberty – is legitimised through national laws in line with internationally accepted standards.

⁷ In several conflicts in the last decades, non-state players have used coercion in connection with mobilisation; for example, in the form of threats of kidnapping/abduction (both individuals/groups), «administrative» measures against families and killings (both recruits and their families). A well-documented example is from the civil war in Sri Lanka. Both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government-friendly Tamil militia linked concrete threats of serious abuse to demands of military involvement. Several thousand minors were mobilised.

⁸ AGE - Anti Government Element

organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and International Crisis Group. In some cases, in Landinfo's opinion, there is little or no correlation between the UNHCR's assessments and the documentation (country information) presented. This applies to both the claim «[...] recruitment mechanisms based on coercive strategies» and the claim «[...] at risk of being killed or punished» (UNHCR 2016).

5.1 EXTENT OF DIRECT COERCION

Landinfo's sources have confirmed that in areas controlled by the Taliban, or areas where the Taliban has a large presence, it is virtually impossible to be in open opposition to the movement. Local communities must adapt to Taliban's local governance. Oppositionists must keep a very low profile or leave the area (conversation with NGO A in Kabul, May 2017).

According to UNAMA, tribal elders are a group exposed to targeted killings (UNAMA & OHCHR 2017, p. 64). Landinfo assumes that this mainly concerns government-friendly tribal leaders who are opposed to the Taliban or other insurgent groups. Analyst Borham Osman (as reported in EASO 2016, p. 24) has pointed to reports of cases of attacks on tribes or communities refusing to support Taliban and to supply fighters. At the same time, the Taliban military units are dependent on support from the population in the areas in which they operate. Several of Landinfo's interlocutors, including an NGO working in Taliban-controlled areas (NGO A, Kabul, May 2017), consider that Taliban today is more responsive to the wishes and needs of local communities than before.

If a local community is attacked or there is an imminent risk of attack, there is a need to mobilise fighters locally, and in such cases it can be difficult not to contribute. According to Osman (as cited in EASO 2016, p. 24), however, it may be possible for the extended family to pay instead of contributing with recruits. Such practices imply that the poorest families contribute with fighters because they do not have the means to pay their way out of the situation.

If it is known that family members are serving in the security forces, the family may be exposed to pressure to get the person to change side. The reason for this is Taliban's strategy of seeking persons with military backgrounds who can contribute with weapons, uniforms and knowledge about the enemy. It may also concern persons who have knowledge and qualifications needed by the Taliban on the battlefield, such as weapons repairs (conversation with an international organisation; conversation with a think tank, conversation with a local journalist April/May 2017).

Combinations of a number of factors make individuals join the Taliban. However, there is very limited information on the use of direct force in connection with recruitment and mobilisation under the auspices of the Taliban. In conversations with Landinfo in the autumn of 2010, Giustozzi considered that this was due to the fact that Taliban had not had a need for coercion in connection with its expansion. In the article *Afghanistan: Human Rights and Security Situation* from 2011 he states that:

Forced recruitment has not been a salient characteristic of this conflict. The insurgents have made recourse to it only very marginally, mainly forcing male villagers in areas under their control and not sympathetic to the insurgents' cause to serve as porters (Giustozzi 2011, p. 6).

The information Giustozzi provided on the occurrence of forced recruitment in November 2015 (conversation in Oslo) does not deviate from his 2011 assessments. The relatively unambiguous picture of recruitment to the Taliban indicates that the organisation is not systematically using forced recruitment or that persons who oppose mobilisation are subjected to threats of rights-violating reactions. Several of Landinfo's interlocutors in Kabul (April 2016) considered that the Taliban did not carry out forced recruitment. An NGO (April 2016) pointed out that it is very easy to desert (conversation in Kabul, April 2016). A national think tank (April 2016) explained that an individual mobilisation practice based on coercion is contrary to key values related to family and free peers in Pashtunwali (see, for example, Landinfo 2011). An international organisation (April 2016) pointed to a factor Landinfo has stressed in connection with source-critical assessment of information on forced recruitment; the sources are often persons or groups who are in a situation where they may have a self-interest in making allegations of forced mobilisation, such as those who have been arrested by the security forces or who want to be screened as IDPs.

In Landinfo's query response of February 2012 on recruitment, it is concluded that direct forced recruitment to Taliban only occurs exceptionally. The response referred to conversations that Landinfo had in Kabul in October 2011 (Landinfo 2012). There is no information to suggest that the extent of forced recruitment has increased in recent years. The changed pattern of conflict and the fact that Taliban has professionalised its forces also mean that direct forced recruitment has probably very low prevalence. In April/May 2017, Landinfo's conversations in Kabul confirmed this; direct forced recruitment occurs to a limited extent and only exceptionally. Taliban has sufficient access to volunteer recruits. One source thought that «it's hard to force an Afghan to fight for something/someone against his will».

5.2 STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

It is first and foremost structural conditions that can be said to represent a form of coercion in recruitment to the Taliban. Structural conditions may be general cultural, religious and social parameters, in combination with limited confidence in the state-building process. Traditional obligations related to tribal and local power groups mean that individuals become part of the Taliban as a result of choices (alliance formation) which they themselves have little influence over. Local powerbrokers are central to the process by which the Taliban establishes itself and gains control in an area. When a central commander and/or tribal elders enter an alliance with the Taliban, this is often done to safeguard the community's interests (Hammer & Jensen 2016). At the same time, it could have consequences for civilians in the area; both by changing the picture of the enemy and in terms of expectations of mobilisation.

Consideration for the collective and collective thinking is central to all ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The collective stands above the individual's wishes and needs, and there is no focus on individual rights (EASO 2016, p. 22). There is limited scope to oppose or ask critical questions about decisions taken by the collective, be it the extended family or the local community. Traditional governing bodies such as tribal elders and tribal councils, allow communities to welcome the Taliban, often as a reaction to maladministration or discrimination by the national authorities. Such collective decisions can also be the result of local conflicts; it is considered beneficial to have an alliance with the Taliban to protect or strengthen their interests. There is a long and broad tradition for collective decisions on loyalty change and alliance

building in Afghanistan, and it is obvious that motivations can be very different. For some groups, it is about consolidating the possibilities of conducting criminal activity, such as local gangs who want to maintain continued control over a smuggling route.

Both coincidences and structural conditions affect choices. If the options in a significant area are limited, there may be a form of coercion. As previously pointed out, the employment market for young persons in Afghanistan is weak. For many, joining the national security forces or the insurgent movement, is one of few real options. The circumstances and structural conditions that are decisive for choices vary from ideology, religion and tradition to social distress. Many who choose the Taliban are under some form of structural coercion; the religious and family-based incentives to support the insurgency are strong and poverty is widespread.

The choices are limited by socioeconomic and/or family relationships, clan and tribal expectations and local political decisions. One cultural feature enhances the structural coercion; the collective is more important than the individual, and the individual is, in almost every respect, a representative of a group. This triggers expectations and obligations. Combinations of culturally-based obligations, religious uniformity, power and socio-economic conditions constitute parameters which mean that large segments of the population have reduced freedom of choice in a number of areas. The basic life conditions represent structural coercion; the available alternatives are essentially alternatives that either restrict freedom, represent serious stigma, violate fundamental rights or bring about risk of abuse or impaired health.

Even if the individual is not exposed to specific threats of sanctions and/or assaults in connection with the decision to join Taliban, the limited options represent a challenging pressure.

6. RECRUITMENT OF MINORS

In the Afghan context, the threshold for when a boy is considered a man is fluid; puberty, beard growth, courage, independence, strength and capacity to represent the extended family are of importance for the assessment. What status a person has on the child-adult axis and at what time the expectation of adult behaviour occurs is usually not in line with either national Afghan or international law. This fact, together with the demographic composition, economic and political parameters and other cultural contexts, leads to a situation in which armed soldiers in different groups may be younger than the limits laid down in international law. Afghans relate, in the vast majority of contexts, only to a small extent to formal and legal rules when considering a person's status, position and maturity.

As mentioned, the extended family is the leading social institution and represents the framework for family members. The family's oldest man is the head and absolute loyalty is expected for decisions that have been taken. Children are subject to the extended family's authority. It is contrary to Afghan culture to «take» children from the family group if it is contrary to the family's wishes and without being rooted in a decision in the family group (conversation with NGO, Kabul 2016).

6.1 TALIBAN'S ATTITUDE

In article 69 of the Taliban regulations, the Layha, it is stated that «Youngsters (*whose beards are not visible because of their age*) are not allowed to be kept by Mujahedin in residential or military centres» (Clark 2011, p. 12).

Although Taliban periodically denies that the organisation uses minors («children and adolescents») in connection with so-called jihadist operations, it is obvious that the guidelines are discretionary. The assessment of the individual commander is the decisive factor. In practice, the local standard for when a person is considered mature and independent will be decisive, rather than actual age.

6.2 EXTENT OF RECRUITMENT OF MINORS

Undoubtedly, recruitment of minors occurs, but it is difficult to estimate the extent and there are probably major local variations. As the Taliban emphasises military experience and expertise more than previously, there is reason to believe that the extent of minors being recruited may be declining.

According to the UN Secretary-General, it was documented that 91 children were recruited in 2016 in Afghanistan.⁹ The figure applies to all parties to the conflict, including the Afghan security forces. According to the Secretary-General, most are recruited by the armed opposition (UN Secretary-General 2017, p. 6). According to the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan (UN Security Council 2015, p. 5), it is documented that 560 minors from 2010 to 2014 have been recruited to armed operations or to perform other services for one of the armed groupings in the country. This concerns minors who contributed both in support functions and in active fighting – information on the distribution is not provided, nor on the children's age. According to the Secretary-General, many were used to transport and deploy IEDs. During the four-year period, the UN registered 20 cases of minors who had committed suicide attacks.

As Landinfo understands the traditions and norms associated with organised violence, they legitimise mobilisation of persons under the age of 18. Landinfo considers that there are probably far more people mobilised in this age category than the limited number of reported cases indicate. Landinfo considers that it is obvious that people are recruited and mobilised in violation of international legislation by all armed groups in Afghanistan; both by the armed opposition and the various private groups that cooperate with the authorities, the so-called government-friendly militias. The security forces have heightened control to prevent persons under the age of 18 from being recruited, but it also seems that minors are still being recruited to government security forces. The interpreter Faizullah Moradi worked for the Norwegian forces in Afghanistan. He explained to the newspaper VG that he was employed as an interpreter before reaching the age of 18 because he lied about his age and submitted false ID documentation (Ege & Widerø 2014). This illustrates how demanding it is to apply strict age provisions in an Afghan context.

⁹ In assessing the numerical material presented here, it is important to be in agreement with the UN definition of children and recruitment; there is a compulsory breach of International age provisions on mobilisation for armed forces, because a legal person under the age of 18 does not have the competence to consent.

In February 2016, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that «Taliban forces in Afghanistan have added scores of children to their ranks since mid-2015 in violation of international prohibition on the use of child soldiers». A spokeswoman for the organisation claimed that the Taliban has recruited children down to thirteen years old (and younger) from madrassas in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakshan. From one district in Kunduz, Chahardara, over 100 children were allegedly recruited in 2015. HRW also stated that Taliban has established training centres in Kunduz. The sources of HRW were reported to be, amongst others, relatives of thirteen of the recruited children and residents of the Chahardara district of Kunduz (HRW 2016).

In a special report from 2015, UNAMA announced that it had received «consistent, credible reports that the Taliban used large numbers of child soldiers during the attack on Kunduz» (UNAMA 2015). Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid rejected the allegations in an official statement and claimed that it is strictly prohibited to recruit children in Taliban (Jolly 2016).

Landinfo comments, however, that the operation in Kunduz City in September/October 2015 had great propaganda and symbolic significance for the Taliban. It was, from a military strategic point of view, a militarily complex and highly offensive action. In view of the fact that the armed forces of the Taliban have become more specialised and professionalised, the use of relatively inexperienced children may appear as rather special in this context. At the same time, the situation in Kunduz was very chaotic and quickly took on its own dynamics. The offensive was initiated by the Taliban's supreme leadership, but shortly afterwards new actors joined; these were local armed groups and militias. They were groups that were not under any of the parties' command, and they were involved in extensive robbery of banks, shops, NGOs and public offices (see, for example, Landinfo 2015). It may be in this context that children were used.

An employee of an NGO (NGO A, conversation in Kabul, May 2017) from a district in Kunduz claimed that the Taliban seems to have a long-term strategy and perspective in terms of recruitment. In the province of Kunduz, large madrassas are built with very many students. In a few years, the boys in the madrassas will be part of Taliban's recruitment base. There are reports of cases of children choosing to join the Taliban of their own volition, but if they change their minds and want to leave the movement, Taliban can prevent them from doing so (HRW 2016).

6.2.1 Young persons between the ages of 15 and 18

Documents are not a key feature of the Afghan society, and many people do not know exactly how old they are. The knowledge Landinfo has about the recruitment of minors indicates that the majority are between 15 and 18 years old. Those who are incorporated into the Taliban are probably only assessed according to usability and qualifications; i.e. a person is mobilised if deemed suitable. Recruitment to both the government security forces and to the armed opposition (including Taliban) is, in the way Landinfo sees it, first and foremost an expression of structural conditions affecting choices, rather than concrete coercion from any of the parties involved. As mentioned earlier, in many areas, armed groups and/or services for one of the parties in the conflict appear to be the only possible income-generating activity and career opportunity for young people.

6.2.2 Children under the age of 15

International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, prohibit actors in an armed conflict from recruiting or using persons under fifteen years old. Mobilisation of persons under fifteen is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the international Criminal Court (ICC).

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of § 38 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Barne- og familiedepartementet 2003) read as follows:

2. *States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.*
3. *States Parties shall refrain from any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.*

There are some reports that children under the age of 15 have committed suicide attacks. According to the UN Secretary-General, a 14-year-old boy carried out a suicide attack in the province of Paktika in February 2014 (UN Secretary Council 2015, p. 6). In a conversation with Landinfo, a UN source (UN source A, April 2016) claimed that children as young as 10-12 years have been recruited by the Taliban. According to the news media TOLO News a 12-year-old boy who was planned to carry out a suicide attack in Faryab in 2015 managed to escape from the Taliban's base. The boy's father allegedly sold his son for 700,000 Afs (about 10,000 USD) (TOLO News 2015). In 2014, three children, six, eight and ten years old respectively, were to move an IED in a wheelbarrow. The IED detonated and two of the children were killed and one wounded (UN Secretary Council 2015, p. 6). The single most reported account in recent years is from the period around the Taliban actions in Kunduz city in 2015. Allegedly, some minors under the age of 15 were mobilised by the Taliban (UNAMA 2015, p. 18).

What is available by way of documentation of recruitment of soldiers under the age of 15, both to the Taliban and to other groups, is almost entirely anecdotal. There is little that indicates that the Taliban organises its activity in such a way that many persons under the age of 15 are recruited for participation in military activity and combat actions.

Landinfo's experiences and impressions, as noted above, coincide with the UNHCR and several of the sources referred to above; nearly all the independent military actors mobilise persons under the age of 18. Although there are no representative numbers, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of minors mobilised are between the ages of 15 and 18. It is probably also the case that many of them are considered adults by local standards. In light of what is referred to as verified cases, there is probably a high number of unrecorded cases.

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