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## DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### AFGHANISTAN - INFORMATION ON THE FORCED RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG BOYS BY THE TALIBAN FROM MADRAS IN AFGHANISTAN

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* reported in December 2023 that “Children were recruited to Taliban ranks during their time as an insurgency and according to some sources, child recruitment has continued after the takeover. Stimson Center estimated that thousands of children may remain in Taliban ranks. According to the Afghan analyst, the Taliban have formed a commission to remove child soldiers from their ranks, and today the Taliban usually avoid recruiting boys that are too young by rejecting children without a beard.”<sup>1</sup>

The *United Nations* points out in December 2023 that “Between 1 July and 30 September, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict documented at least 400 grave violations against at least 120 children (approximately 100 boys and 20 girls). The most prevalent violations included incidents of denial of humanitarian assistance, killing and maiming, mostly due to explosive ordnance, and recruitment and use.”<sup>2</sup>

In a report published in September 2023, the *US Department of Labor* mentions that “The Taliban usually recruits boys between the ages of 14 and 17, and 97 percent of these become part of the Taliban's security forces.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (5 December 2023) EUAA COI Report - Afghanistan: Country Focus [2. Security situation]

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (1 December 2023) The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (December 2023), p.7

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Labor (26 September 2023) 2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Afghanistan, p.3

The *US Department of State's* "Trafficking in Persons" Report from June 2023 found a repeated pattern of "employing or recruiting child soldiers and a pattern of sexual slavery by the Taliban (*bacha bazi* – a practice in which men exploit boys for social and sexual entertainment)." <sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, in March 2023, the *US Department of State* mentioned in their annual "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" that "On March 27, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a decree banning child recruitment by Taliban members, and the Taliban claimed that they did not allow children younger than 18 to join any of their forces." <sup>5</sup> However, the report also stated that "the *Children and Armed Conflict Report* verified the recruitment and use in the country of at least 58 boys, of whom 34 were attributed to the Taliban." <sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the report found that "Taliban "commanders" reportedly remain involved in *bacha bazi* and child soldiering. In at least four cases across the country, boys ages 14-16 reported being abused by the Taliban. Reports indicated that child soldier recruitment by the Taliban and *bacha bazi* incidents increased during the year, despite their prohibition." <sup>7</sup>

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* notes in January 2023 that "In more than 20 years of armed conflict, the Taliban have reportedly used children as fighters, to plant and detonate IEDs, and as suicide bombers. There were reportedly thousands of children in their ranks, often trained in *madrassas* and recruited through force and threats, deception, promises of money or other incentives. The Taliban have denied that they use children in 'jihadic operations' and their code of conduct states that 'boys without beards' are not allowed in military centres. Moreover, in more recent years, the Taliban reportedly 'expressed some sensitivity' to the problematic issue of child recruitment. Nevertheless, hundreds of individual cases of child recruitment by Taliban forces have been documented, with a significant increase in 2020." <sup>8</sup>

In July 2022, *Asylos, Clifford Chance* reported "Nonstate and armed groups, primarily the Taliban and ISIS-K, accounted for most child recruitment and used children younger than 12 during the year. Insurgent groups, including the Taliban, used children as suicide bombers. The *Children and Armed Conflict Report* verified the recruitment and use of 196 boys, of whom 172 were attributed to the Taliban and the remainder to pre-August 15 government or progovernment forces. Children were used in combat, including attacks with IEDs. Nine boys were killed or injured in combat. Insurgent groups, including the Taliban and ISIS-K, used children in direct hostilities, to plant and detonate IEDs, carry weapons, surveil, and guard bases. The Taliban recruited child soldiers from *madrassas* in the country and Pakistan that provide military training and religious indoctrination, and it sometimes provided families cash payments or protection in exchange for sending their children to these schools. UNAMA verified the recruitment of 40 boys by the Taliban, the ANP, and progovernment militias half in the first half of the year. In some cases the Taliban and other anti-government elements used children as suicide bombers, human shields, and to place IEDs, particularly in southern provinces. Media, NGOs, and UN agencies reported the Taliban tricked children, promised

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State (15 June 2023) Trafficking in Persons Report 2023: Afghanistan

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State (20 March 2023) 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan, p.10

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p11

<sup>8</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (25 January 2023) EUAA Country guidance: Afghanistan (January 2023) [Chapter 3. Refugee status]

them money, used false religious pretexts, or forced them to become suicide bombers.” [...] <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the document reported on a man’s personal account of recruitment in Afghanistan, who stated that his “whole reason for coming here was because the Taliban wanted to recruit”<sup>10</sup> him. “They come to your house, and the first time, they ask nicely. But if you don’t agree, then they use force.” Azlan, who originally comes from a province in northern Afghanistan, told this newspaper that he was beaten three times by the Taliban. He eventually came to the UK via a circuitous route in 2015, leaving shortly after the Taliban kidnapped him in a bid to forcibly recruit him. “I was there for two days and I told them, I don’t believe in your fight,” he said. “No matter what colour or religion you are, you are human.” The Taliban beat him so hard that they thought he was dead. Fearing that the next beating would be fatal, his family sent him to Pakistan, Iran, and he then travelled across Europe to the UK.”<sup>11</sup>

In June 2022, the *United Nations* reported on the verified “recruitment and use of 58 boys, some as young as 12, by the Taliban (34)...”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Asylos, Clifford Chance (28 July 2022) Afghanistan: COI Repository; 1st September 2021- 27th July 2022, p.94

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> United Nations (23 June 2022) Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (June 2022) [Afghanistan excerpt]

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