



UNITED NATIONS

Pre-deployment Package for UN Staff: Country-Specific Guide AFGHANISTAN

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1. General Country Information

- a. Welcome note from Resident Coordinator's Office / UN Agency Country Representative (optional)

A personal welcome note from the senior leadership in-country.

- b. General description (population, ethnicity, geography, languages)

Landlocked Afghanistan is a south and central Asian country bordering six different countries: Pakistan to the south and east, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast. The country has a population of 31 million people, a multi-ethnic mix with the Pashtun constituting the majority of the population at 42 percent, followed by the Tajik at about 10 percent, and Uzbeks and Hazara at 9 and 8 percent respectively. There are also other smaller ethnic groups in the country. Almost the entire country's population is Muslim. Pashto and Dari are the official languages. The capital of the country is Kabul with an estimated population of over 3 million.

- c. Map of country



- d. Key political information

After decades of war and Taliban rule, Afghanistan continues to face many serious challenges, including fighting armed insurgency and combatting a high level of drug trafficking. Weak governance and ethnic and local loyalties of officials and institutions compound these complex problems. However, the power-sharing agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, reached in 2014, has persisted despite obstacles.

e. Key socioeconomic information

Afghanistan, one of the least developed countries in the world, continues to face significant economic challenges despite infrastructure improvements. Foreign investment continues to be deterred by the difficult security situation. Untapped mineral resources have an estimated value of USD \$1 trillion but leveraging this potential may be challenging due to insecurity, a lack of infrastructure and endemic corruption. Production of opium continues to dominate the economy, representing some 5% of the country's GDP and 90% of the world's illicit supply. The United States has prioritised agricultural assistance programs over poppy eradication. However, opium production remains more lucrative than other agriculture options. The drug trade has fuelled corruption at all levels of government and has helped finance the Taliban insurgency.

f. Climate

Afghanistan's climate is continental with hot summers reaching at least mid-40s°C in the southern provinces, and very cold winters. There can also be significant climate variability in different years, causing regular droughts or flooding in some parts of the country. Afghanistan is largely semi-arid or arid. Snowfall is concentrated in the central highlands and northeast ranges, where the temperatures can fall to below -15 °C for lengthy periods during the winter. Mediterranean weather fronts influence most of the country, with low or erratic rainfall in spring. The eastern part of the country is near the margin of the monsoon system of the Indian subcontinent meaning areas of the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman and Nangarhar can receive up to 1,200 mm of rain in summer, five times the national average.

g. Food / Cuisine

Afghanistan prides itself on its traditional dishes which are relatively consistent across the country's diverse regions. Most meals include kabuli, a mountain of boiled rice concealing tender joints of lamb or chicken, decorated with grated orange or carrot, pistachio and raisins. Kabab, pieces of lamb (sometimes also of chicken) interspersed with pieces of enriching fat grilled on long skewers over open charcoal are another popular tradition. Meals are usually served with sweet fizzy drinks – which many Afghans argue aid digestion – including international brands such as Coca Cola, Pepsi, Fanta as well as local brands. Sweetened artificial fruit juices – sharbat - may also be served.

Foreign cuisine remains a novelty and as Afghans are generally conservative eaters, is only found where there is a large international community. Kabul is uniquely well-served with international restaurants including Chinese, Croatian, French, German, Indian, Iranian and Thai offerings. There are also a small number of international restaurants in hotels such as the Intercontinental and Serena. Prices are not low by local standards, at around US\$20 for dinner per head, without alcoholic drinks. **Please note UN Staff are only permitted to go to UN Security Management System (UNSMS – formerly 'MOSS') compliant restaurants.**

Vegetarian dishes are not commonly served for entertaining but home cooking will usually include spinach, potato, squash, cauliflower, lady finger (okra), or burani bonjon – grilled aubergine served on a tomato sauce base with yoghurt. Vegetarians should note that some vegetable dishes are traditionally served with sauce containing meat.

In Kabul there is a wide variety of international food available, including canned food and jars. Wrapped cheeses, ground and instant coffee, chocolates, cereals, sauce, herbs, cooked meats and sausages (all of which are 'halal' and thus beef-based) are all readily available.

Alcohol is only served to foreigners and is not widely available. Expatriates may bring in two bottles of wine or spirits upon arrival.

2. *Health, Safety and Security Information*

a. Natural disasters

Afghanistan is prone to natural disasters, including earthquakes and flooding. Most older buildings in Afghanistan have low standards of construction and are not built to withstand seismic shocks. Seasonal flooding often occurs in the spring and summer months as a result of snow melting and the rainy season.

b. Health risks and information, including vaccinations

The UN Medical Directors have developed [Vaccination and Malaria Prophylaxis Recommendations](#) for all United Nations staff on Official Travel. Please be sure to consult this document in preparation for your travel. This policy also covers specific recommendations for vaccines for United Nations healthcare workers who work directly with patients or handle material that could spread infection.

In addition to any vaccines that are specifically required for your duty station, ensure you are up-to-date and current on routine vaccines before you travel. These vaccines include: Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP); measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), Polio, Hepatitis B, and Seasonal influenza (annual shot).

The following vaccinations are also recommended prior to travel to Afghanistan: Cholera, Hepatitis A, Meningitis A, C, Y, W 135, Rabies, Tuberculosis, Typhoid and Yellow Fever (mandatory for travellers coming from endemic areas).

For some locations, malaria protection may be advisable and prophylactic treatment against malaria for these locations is recommended. The UN Medical clinic in Kabul has vaccines for Hepatitis B and Anti-Rabies only.

c. Medical facilities in-country

i. Hospitals

The standard of health care in Afghanistan remains poor and evacuation for all but the most routine medical problems is usually recommended. Poorly equipped facilities staffed by inadequately trained medical practitioners are common. Private clinics are unregulated and may be operated by unlicensed and uncertified individuals. Healthcare facilities have also been the deliberate target of militant attacks. Despite improvements to healthcare in recent years, particularly by for-profit and NGO sectors, public healthcare facilities should be avoided.

The UNAMA clinic in Kabul is headed by an International Medical Officer.

Expatriates in Kabul can use the following medical facilities, but access to them is determined by the prevailing security situation so is not guaranteed:

- American Medical Center Afghanistan, Kabul, 15th Street Road, Lane 4 Wazir Akbar Khan
+93 79 555 700
- Kaisha Healthcare Hospital, Kabul, Charahi Sarsabzi Taimani Circle Near Sham e Paris
+93 799 200 540
- BK German Medical Diagnosis Centre, Kabul, Ansary Street - House 192 Sharhe-Naw,
www.medical-kabul.com Cell: + 93 799 913 62 10
- Icarus medical clinic in Green Village which is close to the UNOCA compound.

ii. Pharmacies and medicine

Both the quality and quantity of in-country health facilities and drugs remain limited, so effort should be focused on preventive action, including obtaining recommended vaccinations in advance of travel.

d. General Security Situation / information

i. Security context

Afghanistan has eight security areas, which contain numerous high to very high security risks, and certain areas which UN staff are not permitted to travel to for security reasons. You will receive specific and current details about the security situation, related security risks and security risk management measures on approval of your TRIP clearance, which can be accessed [here](#). This may include restrictions on your movements, requirements for compliance with mandatory training (including SSAFE), personal protective equipment (PPE), emergency procedures and regular practice of contingency planning. The security situation in Afghanistan is volatile, and security risk management measures may change rapidly to address the evolving situation.

In general terms in the country, political, ethnic and religious tensions remain high and often erupt into civil unrest in the form of violent protests. Controversial actions by foreign troops, or allegations and perceptions of such actions, have sparked anti-Western demonstrations in the past that have impacted United Nations staff. The United Nations has been directly targeted by threat actors launching complex and/or suicide attacks against United Nations staff, premises and assets. This has resulted in additional physical and other security mitigation measures, varying in degree according to the Security Area, but including hardened compounds, travel by armoured vehicles, and the use of PPE. Developments globally, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia and throughout the wider Muslim world have also prompted past protests within the vicinity, or focussed on, UN compounds and offices. Kidnapping is a significant concern for both foreigners and locals in Afghanistan. Abductions are carried out for both financial gain and political/ideological purposes, and kidnapping has become a significant source of income for insurgent groups. Groups have directly targeted United Nations personnel, foreign journalists, security contractors, NGO workers, missionaries and soldiers, primarily in rural Afghanistan but also in urban areas.

ii. Local security briefing

In addition to the security information provided on receipt of a security clearance, a mandatory security briefing for incoming staff members is conducted by UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and by agency security field staff to inform staff members about the prevailing security situation and emergency security measures particular to the area in which they are posted. This is to ensure staff members are prepared and know what to do in any situation. As in all high-risk duty stations, staff are required to complete all mandatory training prior to departure and on arrival Security briefings will be provided within 24 hours of arrival in Afghanistan by the local Field Security Adviser (FSA). During this briefing, staff will be issued with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which should be kept at hand. Staff will also be issued with mobile phones and radio handset to facilitate communications.

Once staff are established, they are required to participate in a 3-day training held in Kabul (SSAFE), and they are registered for this by their agency.

iii. Security communications

For security reasons, it is mandatory for all UN staff in Afghanistan to carry at least one means of communication with them at all times. This is to ensure that staff can be reached in the case of an incident or emergency, and for sharing information in a timely manner. All international staff will be

issued with a local SIM card and/ or mobile phone and a hand-held radio on arrival at the Duty Station. Daily radio checks are mandatory.

3. *Before Travel*

a. Required UN Clearance

All new arrivals require security clearance from the UN Field Security Office to enter Afghanistan and travel must not begin without confirmation of this clearance. Security clearance will only be issued upon completion within the last three years of the two online Basic and Advanced Security Courses provided by UNDSS. A copy of the security clearance will be sent to both you and your agency focal point in your country of departure. (Note: without security clearance, passengers will not be allowed to board UN flights). In most cases, travel arrangements will also be made by the recruiting UN agency. On approval of your security clearance, you will receive specific security information and requirements for your duty station. It is your responsibility to ensure you are compliant with these instructions. If there are any questions you may follow up with your office or relevant security counterpart.

b. Visas

Visas for Afghanistan should be obtained well in advance of travel, including those needed for any in-transit stop-over in a third country. It is also recommended to obtain a visa for a neighbouring country which may be required for evacuation purposes. Advice should be sought from the appointing UN agency on whether this should be obtained in advance. An official letter of request will be required from the appointing UN agency and you should carry a copy of your “offer of assignment” and any related documentation when travelling. For travellers from countries without an Afghan Embassy or Consulate, visa on arrival can be arranged, provided scanned copies of the UNLP and national passport are sent to the recruiting agency at least two weeks in advance. Travel should only commence once a notification from Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been obtained that the visa will be issued on arrival.

c. Advice on what to bring

- World Health Organizations International Certificate of Vaccination (A yellow book that you can obtain from most medical clinics and UN offices) as this is sometimes required by customs upon arrival in Dubai or Islamabad which serve as potential safe havens in the event of evacuation.
- As much entertainment (books, movies, music etc.) as possible. UN residential facilities have a range of satellite TV channels, but whilst there is a range of news sources, the choice of entertainment channels is limited.
- Clothing to reflect the local culture and climate, including sufficient warm clothes for winter.
- You should bring USD 200 – 300 with you for use in the first few days of your assignment. US Dollars may be drawn from cash machines in the compounds where UN staff reside, usually with a daily limit of USD 200-300.

4. *Arrival*

a. At the airport

Immigration - Follow the other passengers to the Immigration Counters. Ensure you have your passport ready. It is normal procedure to have your fingerprints and photograph taken.

Baggage reclaim - The baggage reclaim hall is located after immigration where your baggage will be available on one of the two carousels. At the baggage reclaim hall, you may be asked by the porters to register at the counter. You can inform them that you are UN staff and do not require this procedure. Trolleys are available in the baggage reclaim hall free of charge along with porters to help take your luggage. Be careful with the porters as they will rush you through the customs and straight

to the car park and could make it more difficult for you to find your driver. There is no standard charge for the porter service and they can demand up to US\$ 10. A reasonable amount for the service is US\$ 4. Upon leaving the baggage hall, you will be asked for the baggage receipts provided when you checked in for your flight; these are then checked against the tags on your baggage.

Customs and Security - Luggage is inspected on arrival. If there is anything suspicious – alcohol exceeding two bottles, metal items in your bags, etc. - you may be asked to open your luggage.

Arrival hall - After picking your bags from the scanner, proceed outside and you should be met by your driver upon first assignment / arrival. Your driver will be in the airport parking lot where UN and CD vehicles wait – approximately 150 metres to the left of the arrivals hall. Your office will arrange your transport from the airport which will include transfer in armoured vehicle and may include transfer in a convoy.

b. How to get to the city

All UN staff are transported in UN marked armoured vehicles. This should be strictly followed, and taxis or private vehicles should not be used.

c. Accommodation options

UN staff members can be housed, at least temporarily, within UN-approved accommodation which complies with UN Security Standards. Bookings will be made by the recruiting UN agency. Costs vary from \$60 - \$100 per night for guest-houses and are significantly cheaper than the UN rates in the international hotels in Kabul.

There is a limited amount of accommodation which has been UN security cleared: currently Green Village which is located on the Jalalabad road and is very close to the UNOCA compound.

A global accommodation website for United Nations staff has been developed which allows staff to view the available UN guesthouses, including photographs, look at their facilities and services and book rooms on-line. In some locations, staff are also able to arrange for Airport Pick-up through this site. The site also allows staff to provide feedback on their experiences in the specific guesthouse, facilitating central monitoring of service levels, and providing support to staff in case issues cannot be resolved in-country. To register, staff can go to accommodation.wfp.org.

5. Work

a. Working Hours and Public Holidays

The official weekend holiday is Friday. The Government weekend is Thursday and Friday, and most service and private sector companies treat Saturday as a working day, whilst many international agencies include this as a weekend holiday.

Public holidays are a mixture of Islamic religious holidays and seasonal or historic festivals. Whereas the latter have fixed dates, religious holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar and thus change annually, often not confirmed for a specific day until immediately beforehand. The following holidays fall regularly on the same day as they follow the Afghanistan solar calendar. If they fall near the weekend, the Government may extend the official holiday period:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| ▪ Naw-Rouz (solar new year) | March 21 |
| ▪ Celebration of the Islamic Revolution | April 28 |
| ▪ National Labour Day | May 1 |
| ▪ Remembrance Day for Martyrs and Disabled | May 4 |

- Independence Day (from Britain in 1919) August 19
- Ahmad Shah Massoud Day September 9

Religious dates include Arafa Ashora Day, Eid ul-Athha (Feast of the Sacrifice), Eid-ul-Milad-ul-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet), First day of the Ramadan Eid-ul-Ramadan. The UN in Afghanistan observes 10 public holidays a year and this list can be obtained from the Resident Coordinator's Office.

6. Living

a. Money and Banking

i. Currency

The national currency in Afghanistan is the Afghani (not to be confused with 'Afghan' – which is the nationality). Afghanis are widely used across the country, but the relatively small denomination of the currency means that for larger transactions US Dollars are often accepted.

UN staff are advised to bring US dollars with them to Afghanistan, and to maintain an emergency reserve of at least US\$ 300 for contingencies. Staff travelling to remote locations are advised to carry both USD and Afghanis.

ii. Local banks / ATMs

Foreigners can open an Afghan bank account should they wish to do so, with an introductory letter from their agency. However, this is not mandatory. A number of banks are in operation and have branches around the country, but the security situation and limitations of movement should be considered. It is not recommended that significant funds are held in Afghan banks, as while the regulatory system in the country is evolving, the reliability of the system has not yet been proven. International bank transfers in and out are reported to be successfully affected within the usual 2-4 working days. The ATM machines on the UN compounds in Kabul, where many agencies have their offices and accommodation for international staff, dispense USD.

iii. Use of Credit Cards / Debits and cash

Credit cards are not widely used in Afghanistan, and staff must be prepared to pay for most transactions in cash. Within UN and Private International compounds, prices in restaurants and shops are typically in US Dollars, although smaller shops also accept Afghan currency. Larger supermarkets within Afghan cities will normally accept both US dollars and Afghanis, however if using USD it is best to have a range of smaller denomination notes to hand, as the availability of change in the same currency may be limited.

b. Water and Utilities

i. Water

UN compounds provide tankered water for showers and washing. Drinking water is supplied to staff residences (for a cost) in large bottles; it is not recommended to drink the water available from the taps.

ii. Electricity

Electricity in Afghanistan is unpredictable. Although it has improved in recent years, voltage flow remains unstable. A voltage stabilizer is necessary to maintain constant 220 volt current. The standard plug fitting is a European-style, two-pin round with a slot for the receptacle's grounding pin (Type E). There is no constant electricity supply in Kabul and most offices and guest houses run generators.

iii. Laundry

Most international staff compounds have laundry services. Long-term guesthouses have their own washing and drying room that have washing machines and dryers.

a. Communications

Mail - There is an outwards postal service from Afghanistan to overseas locations and despite its apparent simplicity, users report success both for letters and even small parcels. Incoming mail is less reliable. There is no system whereby mail can be delivered to home addresses, though it is possible for letters to be delivered to a well-established office address which is registered with the local post office. Courier services (DHL, FedEx, TNT etc) are available. Post office opening hours are 08.00 – 15.00 every day except Friday. Staff may receive mail through their office's pouch system, but that is usually limited to letters and small packets.

Mobile - Mobile phones are the primary means of communication in Afghanistan. The country has four main telecommunications providers (Roshan, Etisalat, Afghan Wireless, MTN) with 90% mobile and some 60% internet coverage. The mountainous terrain can lead to signal disruptions in rural areas, and in urban areas signals are commonly disrupted due to poor service or signal jamming by military actors. Mobile phones can be purchased with pre-paid cards (best purchased from reliable sources). Agencies have their own specific arrangements for the deduction of private call costs from mobile phones provided for official use.

Landline - Digital land lines are available in limited quantities in major cities. In Kabul, costs are around US \$200 for national service and US \$500 for international service.

c. City guide

i. Shopping

For those interested in Afghanistan's products, beyond carpets and ghillims which come in an expanding variety of designs and colours (as well as costs), there are horse or camel clothes; door hangings; and tent bands traditionally produced for everyday use by the Turkmen tribes; new leather bags; blue, turquoise and golden glass from Herat; Istalif pottery; old silks and embroidery for personal or household adornment; intricate hand-made old locks; samovars that reflect the tea drinking traditions of Central Asia; copper and brass household pots and utensils; jewellery of precious and semi-precious stones as well as old silver traditional ornaments; hand-chiselled, dark-stained Nuristani furniture decorated with red and yellow medallions, decorative yet practical stained wooden boxes for storing spices or jewels; and hand-carved stone animals reflecting the myths and folk tales of Afghanistan's various invaders.

Previously, the security situation allowed expatriates to investigate shops in the arteries off the main roads in Kabul. Browsing is one of the city's few sources of entertainment, and there is no obligation to buy. Indeed, many merchants enjoy the interaction as much as the customer, and for larger purchases are happy for you to 'take home and try' – with no payment until the deal is agreed. In recent years, this has not been possible, but UN compounds and embassies regularly organise bazaars, when local traders bring products in for staff to examine and buy.

Be prepared, as in all capital cities, to pay higher prices (particularly as a foreigner) in the upmarket parts of town. Negotiation is the norm and can be fun for those with determination and time to drink tea. For larger household purchases, it is recommended to browse with a national colleague, and then send him / her to negotiate the price or, even better, ask them to seek the same item with considerable savings in the local Afghan bazaars.

ii. Entertainment

Other than work there is little entertainment available, so you will need to be creative about how to spend time outside work; develop a new hobby and bring as much entertainment (books, movies, music etc.) as possible. UN compounds have a limited range of satellite TV channels.

iii. Sightseeing.

While most of Kabul's once-famous Old City has been totally destroyed, a number of its historic sites still exist, as does its zoo. Attractions include the Gardens of Babur, a well-preserved museum, and the ancient remnants of the Bala Hissar citadel. Although none are yet restored to their former glory, visits are worthwhile and historical tours can be found in the guides by Nancy Hatch Dupree.

Away from Kabul, other interesting places include Mazar-e Sharif in north-eastern Afghanistan, Samangan (Aibak) site for the caves, and the Buddhist of Takht-e Rostam shrine.

All such outings should be checked first with the UN Security Coordinator's office and undertaken only with UN drivers. During periods of heightened security threats, movements to locations not considered critical will be restricted.

7. Local Culture

a. General description of local culture

Afghanistan is an Islamic country with a strict Islamic culture. The following needs to be observed when in the country:

- Travellers should avoid discussing religion, politics, the Quran, the prophet Muhammad or any other aspects of Islam. Comments that are construed as disrespectful can lead to arrest, expulsion, or physical harm.
- Honour - An individual's worth and that of his family, friends and associates is defined by honour. Whilst some allowances may be made for foreigners it is nevertheless vital that you do not act in any way to detract from the honour of your Afghan contacts.
- Family - The role of family is closely related to the concept of honour. Men are traditionally the main income earners in an Afghan household. Few women work outside the home. Great respect is given to the elderly and age dictates seniority on almost all occasions. Families are often large and regular contact is maintained and cherished with distant relatives.
- Tribal affiliations are important in Afghan culture. The opinion of tribal elders tends to be influential and loyalty to your own tribe remains an important cultural value.

b. Social Etiquette

- A handshake is a standard Afghan greeting among men, but more familiar acquaintances will often embrace. The greeting of "salaam" (hello) is generally used, and titles precede the name during introductions.
- It is considered offensive for a man to embrace or greet a woman. Strict Islamic guidelines for dress apply in Afghanistan (see below).
- Men, particularly those of foreign origin, should not attempt to speak with an Afghan woman without getting permission from her husband or using him as an intermediary.

c. Dress Code

While political dictates on dress for women and men no longer exist in Afghanistan, social values remain traditional in that style, fit and colour are intended to detract attention from body form. The

country is (predominantly Sunni) Muslim, with much of the population - particularly those in rural areas - observing very conservative rules of behaviour and dress.

The “shalwar kameez” traditionally worn in Pakistan is now popular with many Afghan women and has virtually become the everyday dress of the traditional Afghan man. Particularly in hot weather, this can be a convenient and comfortable outfit for work outside of Kabul; the kameez can be conveniently worn with western trousers.

- **Foreign men** - Western business attire is acceptable for men, though short sleeves are not appropriate for formal business meetings without a jacket and are less acceptable in rural areas. Trousers should be loose both for comfort and modesty in the prevailing social context. Shorts are not acceptable even in the hottest of weather except in private international space. If a jogger, bring long pants.
- **Foreign women** – international women in working in Afghanistan should dress modestly in order not to cause offence or attract unwanted attention. This means wearing clothing that does not expose any flesh beyond that of the head, hands, and feet. Fitted or tailored clothes which show the shape of the body should be avoided. While Kabul is much more free and smart business wear is acceptable between home and office, movement in the city’s bazaars and in all other parts of the country requires trousers or long skirts with loose fitting long-sleeved shirts, tunics or jackets that cover the hips. In public spaces, a scarf covering the head is recommended, and appreciated by many women and men as a token of respect for Islamic values. Whilst head cover for women is not required while at work within urban offices, it is welcomed in many rural areas. It is not a requirement when visiting government offices, though to do so can go a long way towards reducing barriers to dialogue with more conservative or less-experienced officials and is recommended for meetings in provincial areas. In the capital, Kabul, many foreign women (including those of Afghan origin) no longer routinely wear a headscarf when travelling in private transport.

When in doubt, both male and female staff are advised to take advice from locally-recruited UN staff.

d. Religious restrictions

Alcohol (which is not widely available for purchase or consumption) should not be openly carried or consumed in public.

e. Gender and diversity

Gender segregation - Afghanistan remains a deeply gender-segregated society where the roles and relationships of men and women are distinctly circumscribed. In general, the public domain of social life is dominated by men; this applies to visibility, mobility and decision making. Foreign men can work for several years and never have direct interactions with Afghan women other than their immediate colleagues. The appropriate place for women is widely considered to be within the walls of the domestic compound where they may exercise considerable control and influence. The centuries-old practice of the seclusion of women is known as purdah (literally “curtain”) and requires that women throughout their reproductive years (starting from around 9 years of age) be removed from sight and interaction with all men other than father, brothers/brothers-in-law and sons. Women’s modesty is the essence of family, tribal and even national honour as well as the source of status and respect within each; men thus assume the role of “protectors” of women, acting as the gatekeepers of women’s mobility and freedoms. For public excursions women require approval from these male relatives and are usually well-covered under a large “chador” (shawl) or burkha.

Crossing these culturally determined boundaries carries risks for both sexes but most especially for women. Any real or perceived transgression can have serious repercussions ranging from reducing the chances of a good marriage, withdrawal of a woman from her work, physical punishment, and even of death where illicit contact with unrelated men is suspected. Particularly vulnerable are the increasing numbers of women who have moved from the domestic world to the public sphere of men to work in offices of government and non-government agencies. While increasingly tolerated, these working women have encroached men's traditional space, and frequently endure harassment ranging from hurtful comments to physical threats and actual abuse. A frequent strategy adopted in many offices by both women and men working together is to consider the work space as a "family", thereby presuming a familial relationship and its associated responsibility between the sexes.

A key to understanding is that "progress" for men is seen as "modern" and, within limits, this is considered desirable. But the same indicators of progress in women are more likely to be described as "Western", which can be perceived as "un-Islamic", and thus more likely to meet with resistance and condemnation. Sensitivity to these distinctions in the norms for male and female behaviour also has implications for foreigners.

While many offices no longer require gender-segregated work spaces, in more conservative locations many people still prefer this arrangement. Outside Kabul, it is common for trainings, public discussions, and meetings to be segregated; interviews and home visits will certainly be segregated with foreign women alone being able to interact with Afghans of both sexes. If making home visits whether for work or social purposes, foreigners are entertained solely by the male members of the family with foreign women being regarded as "honorary men". As a mark of deep respect, a foreign woman may be invited to enter the private quarters of the family where the women of the household remain hidden from view.

Work transport, particularly in rural areas, may also need to be segregated for men and women, and almost certainly Afghan women will not be comfortable seated next to unrelated Afghan men. If travelling long distances or overnight, Afghan women may need to be accompanied by a mahram (guardian, a close male relative) as a matter of family and social respect. If not, their overnight accommodation should be arranged in pairs of women, and in sleeping quarters that are clearly separated from those of men.

8. *Local Benefits and Entitlements*

UN agencies can insert information about local benefits and entitlements such as the R&R cycle and Hardship Allowance here. Agencies covered by the [International Civil Service Commission](#) may also wish to sign-post the website here which provides up-to-date information about relevant benefits by location.

9. *Useful Numbers*

To be inserted by each agency

10. *Further information (optional)*

UN agencies can provide any other additional information in this section. Some examples include:

- Useful phrases in the local language.
- Suggested websites / reading for further information.