



UNITED NATIONS
AFGHANISTAN



COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS 2021

United Nations Afghanistan



Wakhan, National Park of Afghanistan
Photo: UNDP





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Contents

<i>The UN Country Common Analysis for Afghanistan</i>	5
<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i>	6
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	8
<i>A. COUNTRY CONTEXT</i>	9
<i>1. Conflict</i>	9
<i>2. Humanitarian Situation</i>	12
<i>3. Economic Overview</i>	14
Structure of the economy	14
Public Finances and Aid Dependency	16
The Rule of Law, Corruption and Governance	18
The Economic Impact of COVID-19	19
<i>4. Social Overview</i>	21
Population	21
Per capita incomes, inequality and poverty	21
The Labour Market	22
Education	25
Health	29
Social protection	32
Gender	34
The Youth	38
Children	39
The Kuchi Community	41
Land	42
The Environment	43
Intersecting forms of exclusion and most vulnerable groups	47
<i>B. THE NATIONAL VISION</i>	48
ANPDF II (2021–25) and the 2030 SDGs	48
The NPPs	51
Looking forward	54
<i>C. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 SDG AGENDA</i>	55
Afghanistan’s approach to the SDGs: A-SDGs	55
Selected A-DGs	57
GOAL 1: No Poverty	57

GOAL 2: Zero Hunger	57
GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being	58
GOAL 4: Quality Education	58
GOAL 5: Gender Equality	58
GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	59
GOALS 9 and 17: Digital Connectivity	60
GOAL 13: Climate Action	60
GOAL 15: Life on Land	61
GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	61
Social Protection: A cross-cutting Issue	61
Looking Forward	62
<i>D. COMMITMENTS UNDER INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND STANDARDS</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>E. FINANCING</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>F. RISKS AND STRENGTHS</i>	<i>67</i>
Risks	67
Strengths	68
ANNEX 1: Core Treaties, Conventions & Protocols to which Afghanistan is a Party	70
ANNEX 2: Multidimensional SDG Risk Analysis Matrix	74
<i>ENDNOTES</i>	<i>84</i>

The UN Country Common Analysis for Afghanistan

The United Nation Country Team (UNCT) works to achieve greater strategic coherence of the UN's operational activities and enhance coordination with relevant stakeholders in full alignment with the Government's national priorities. At a time of emerging prospects for peace, the United Nations supports the Government and people of Afghanistan in achieving a lasting peace, supporting a nexus from humanitarian aid to recovery and moving forward on the path to sustainable development. The United Nations joint value proposition is underpinned by human rights, gender equality, people-centered approaches and conflict sensitivity.

The Common Country Analysis (CCA) for Afghanistan is the United Nations' independent, collective, forward-looking analysis of the country context in response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Afghanistan's announced plans. The CCA will be updated annually, allowing the UN country team to generate tailored analytical and policy-relevant products.

The CCA has been developed by 22 thematic writing groups. Each group comprised experts from multiple UN entities, adopting an integrated approach to the analysis going beyond the mandate of each UN entity. Special attention was paid to ensuring that the analysis reflected the complex and fast-evolving situation.

The regional office of the UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) provided extensive support, including assistance on developing the conflict analysis for Afghanistan. From the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Statistical Data Management Unit provided an input on Afghanistan's progress towards the SDGs; the Sustainable Socioeconomic Transformation Section provided an analysis of the most marginalized groups in Afghanistan.

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic limited the scope of wider stakeholder consultation, this CCA reflects the experience and knowledge accumulated through the engagement of the beneficiaries, government counterparts, donors and development partners and donors by each UN entity.



An Afghan woman in a wheat field in one of Afghanistan's provinces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan has made significant progress in the last 20 years, most notably in education, health, gender equality, the rule of law, and public finance.

However, continuing conflict threatens these gains and weakens prospects for further progress. Weak governance, a fragile economy, environmental degradation and fast population growth have compounded the adverse effects of war. Such emergencies include food insecurity, and large-scale population displacement. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the increasing pressures on the economy and livelihoods. Ecological threats continue to increase in frequency and intensity, necessitating humanitarian assistance for half of the population.

The limited control over the country's territory constrains the Government's ability to raise revenues and effectively pursue economic and social development objectives. A lack of transparency and accountability often impedes the effective use of financial resources under Government control. It enables the non-state actors to serve as livelihood providers and act as community brokers under an informal justice system. The limited ability of the Government to ensure security, support livelihood and provide social protection undermines citizens' trust and poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the Government. Until Afghanistan can break this vicious circle, future development is likely to be slow. Analysts expect the country to meet only nine per cent of the SDGs by 2030.

Moving forward, Afghanistan will need to establish stability through a ceasefire. It could then improve

governance, reduce corruption, establish control over the country, and ensure policy coherence across all development and humanitarian areas. Although prospects for peace remain uncertain, actors can take measures to set the foundations for an accelerated development process.

Afghanistan has opportunities. It could take advantage of its strategic location, youthful demography and rich deposits of natural resources to raise productivity and incomes. Public actors can enhance the role of women in the economy and public life. With a more stable economic environment, the country can attract investment from domestic and foreign sources, leading to growth in value added, regional integration and the export market. Over time, this would raise household income and Government revenues. Growing Government income would result in opportunities to modernize the agriculture sector and invest in education, health services, and social protections, thus creating a virtuous cycle that improves citizens' trust in Government and contributes to future peace.

The challenge of establishing such a scenario, however, is enormous. The impact of conflict is likely to persist for some time. Meanwhile, the drivers for accelerating economic growth and citizen well-being are weak, perpetuating dependency on non-state actors. At present, poverty is pervasive, with more than half of the population being below the official poverty line (at \$1 per person per day) and 95 per cent living on \$2 per person. In addition, Afghanistan has many marginalized groups that require urgent intervention: women and children, especially girls; internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees; and minority

populations, including nomadic communities. Vulnerability and weak resilience are endemic. The risk of leaving behind a majority of the population is high.

The current Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II: 2021 to 2025) provides a Governmental and international partner cooperation strategy. It paves the way towards some achievement of SDGs by 2030. Building on ANPDF I (2017–21), ANPDF II adopts an integrated approach toward Peacebuilding, State-Building and Market-Building through its planning instruments, the National Priority Programs (NPPs). The NPPs support SDG adjustment to the domestic context, i.e. the Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (A-SDGs) as agreed with the international community.

The ANPDF II and the NPPs align with the humanitarian/development/peace nexus, supported by the UN through the five pillars of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. They constitute a strong basis for the international community to continue providing support to Afghanistan.

Given the uncertainties surrounding the peace process, any approach to development needs to be flexible, taking into account what has worked better in the past. Actors may also require novel approaches to address the root causes of conflicts. Donors have experienced growing frustration with a multitude of unfinished or poorly implemented projects. Due consideration should therefore be

given to the national implementation capacity. The promise of future support by the international community is not unconditional and would depend on Afghanistan's progress towards the goals set out in the ANPDF II. Much of that success will depend on halting the recent increase in violence. The vast majority of the population (90 per cent) supports efforts to reach inclusive peace. Most believe that reconciliation is possible. People want to protect, preserve and promote freedom of speech, freedom of the press and women's rights.

Recognizing that only Afghans can achieve peace for Afghans, the UN is standing by to support the peace and reconciliation process, working with the Government, civil society, private sector actors, and international partners. By aligning with national efforts, the UN can provide the basis for cooperation and coordination of the international assistance to Afghanistan across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, balancing short-term needs and long-term sustainability as envisaged in the 2030 SDGs agenda. In doing so, donors and development partners must determine intervention time horizons by the time required to achieve results rather than their budgetary cycles. Policies and projects should be country-driven, less complex, flexible to the security situation and based on a realistic assessment of ground capacities. Projects must consider the future financing required to sustain them after donor funds are reduced or depleted. Any intervention must be sensitive to cultural norms and customs.



INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is saddled by the legacy of conflict and the prospect of increasing violence. That is in addition to the challenges that developing countries face across the economic, social and environmental spectrum. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded these problems further. Moreover, weak state capacity, limited government control over the territory, illicit economic activities and dependency on foreign aid have slowed progress towards the SDGs, even reversing some of the gains achieved since 2001.

Moving forward would require a concerted effort from Afghan stakeholders and international partners. Peace in the immediate future is necessary to create the conditions needed for long-term, sustainable development. In the meantime, Afghanistan requires additional efforts to address the many humanitarian crises the country currently faces.

On this basis, the UN has prepared the current Common Country Analysis (CCA). It serves as a comprehensive assessment of Afghanistan's current situation for greater strategic coherence of UN activity. The CCA will enhance coordination with relevant stakeholders, bearing in mind the Government's national priorities and capabilities (**TEXTBOX 1**). The CCA has been developed using primary and published data, a literature review, key informant interviews, and theme-specific analyses by twenty-two UN multi-agency groups during the last quarter of 2020. In addition, it includes selected updates on the evolution of the conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic and budgetary development up to April 2021.

The first section summarizes the security situation – the prime determinant of Afghanistan's long-term prospects. Achieving and adhering to peace is something that very much depends on Afghans themselves. An assessment of the pressing humanitarian situation will then follow. The CCA will provide a country overview focusing on the economy and public finances, including the role of international aid, the rule of law and corruption, and the impact of the pandemic. It then gives an overview of social sectors, examining population issues, poverty and inequality, the labour market and critical public social services (education, health and social protection). This section includes an analysis of specific topics such as gender, youth and children, minority representation, land and the environment.

Having set the stage, the CCA then discusses the current vision of the Government as included in the ANPDF II (2021–25) and the new NPPs it hopes to implement in the medium-term. Next, the discussion considers the SDG agenda, assessing progress so far and prospects until 2030. The CCA finally reviews Afghanistan's financing situation, listing its commitments under international norms and standards. The CCA includes a consideration of the risks and challenges the country faces against its strengths.

The discussion and findings are in line with the firmly held belief by the Government and the international community that achieving peace is the fundamental precondition for the future stability and sustainable development of Afghanistan. With national cohesion, Afghanistan can progress towards humanitarian goals through the rule of law and transparent public finance.

A. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Afghanistan has a rich ethnic and cultural composition. The constitution officially recognizes 14 ethnic groups and two official languages while it grants several others a “third official language” status in areas with diverse populations. Today’s population is estimated to be about 40 million. The economic base is small for such a large population resulting in the per capita incomes of only around \$500. A significant part of economic activity is in the informal sector, some of which are illicit and under the control of anti-government elements (AGEs) . Thus, the ability of the Government to raise revenues is limited, making the country heavily dependent on foreign country’s rough geographical terrain. Exposure to natural disasters and continuing conflict are creating acute humanitarian needs and challenging the resilience of its people.

Achieving peace will be the most important determinant of the future of Afghanistan. It is the first of three objectives of the Government’s national development strategy, the *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2021–2025* (ANPDF II). To be pursued jointly, state-building aims to “combat corruption, strengthen sub-national governance, improve infrastructures, build human capital and improve public financial management systems”. Market-building efforts will support these two objectives and reduce poverty,

increasing resilience and improving social conditions. By aligning these priorities to the SDGs, Afghanistan has an overarching planning framework for the Government and international partners.

1. Conflict

Afghanistan has experienced armed conflicts since the 1970s. The recent increase in the intensity of warfare has made Afghanistan “the least peaceful country in the world” in 2020.¹ It is one of the seven “High-Intensity” conflict countries globally.²

The Government has limited territorial control over the country. In large areas, AGEs tax the local population. They provide employment, offer security and community-based justice and promote social protection in line with local customs. They constitute a shadow government and enjoy a degree of strategic allegiance in the areas they control.

In addition to human costs and the loss of Government revenue, the conflict has an enormous adverse impact on the economy. According to one estimate, the economic cost of war in Afghanistan was nearly 17 per cent of GDP in 2019 – the highest in the world (**Figure 1**).³ An index based on the broader definition of “violence” assessed the losses as high as 47 per

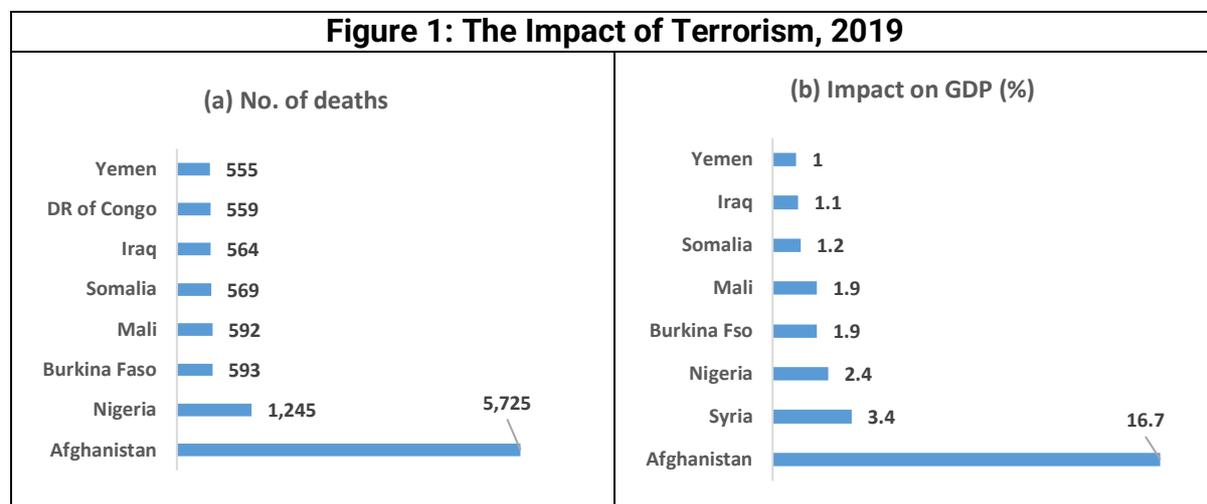
¹ 2020, Relief Web, [Global Peace Index](#)

² 2019, World Bank, [List of Fragile and Conflict-affect Situations](#)

³ 2019, Institute of Economics & Peace, [Global Terrorism Index](#) The total economic impact of terrorism includes the direct cost of terrorism deaths, injuries and property damage, as well as the indirect costs from deaths, injuries, property damage and GDP losses. It also includes a multiplier effect on the direct costs. Direct costs are expenditures incurred by the victim, the perpetrator and the government. Indirect costs accrue after the fact and include the present value of the long-term costs arising from the incidence of terrorism, such as lost future income and physical and psychological trauma.

cent of GDP in 2018.⁴ International studies suggest that, during the average conflict year, GDP per capita grows 2.2 per cent slower than during peacetime. Other studies have

estimated that internal armed conflicts can take away up to 30 years of GDP growth.⁵ A 15 year-long war can, on average, reduce per capita incomes by 30 per cent.⁶



Source: Institute of Economics and Peace (2020b)

Since 2009, there have been more than 100,000 civilian casualties, with 35,000 killed and 65,000 injured. In 2020, the conflict resulted in 8,820 civilian casualties (3,035 dead and 5,785 wounded).⁷ The majority of civilian casualties – 62 per cent – were caused by AGEs, with 45 per cent attributed to the Taliban, 8 per cent to Islamic State in the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-

KP). Pro-Government Forces caused a quarter of civilian casualties – 22 per cent by Afghan national security forces.⁸ Women and children accounted for 43 per cent of all civilian casualties. More women were killed in the conflict in 2020 than any year since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009. In total, 1,150 women and children were killed (390

⁴ This high estimate of economic costs is measured as expenditures aimed to “contain, prevent and deal with the consequences of violence”. It includes the direct and indirect costs of violence. It refers to military and internal security spending on the police and judicial systems as well as the costs associated with incarceration, private security expenditures, forced displacements, homicides, suicides, arm conflict, violent crimes and sexual assaults. It also takes into account the consequences on the victims, perpetrators, public systems including health, judicial and public safety as well as the longer-term costs of violence upon lost productivity, psychological effects and perception of safety and security. The multiplier effect represents the flow-on effects of direct costs, such as additional economic benefits that would come from investment in business development or education instead of containing or dealing with violence and captures the additional economic activity that would have accrued if the costs of violence had been avoided. Its value is assumed to be one. Still, the total estimate excludes impacts arising from the cost of crime to business, judicial system expenditure, domestic violence, household out-of-pocket spending on safety and security, and spillover effects from conflict and violence. Global Terrorism Index. Institute of Economics & Peace. <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/07/GPI-2019web.pdf>

⁵ 2018, Relief Web, [2018, Relief Web, Preventing and responding to conflict-related humanitarian crises: An Australian Checklist for Action](https://www.reliefweb.int/report/australia/2018/relief-web-preventing-and-responding-to-conflict-related-humanitarian-crises-australian-checklist-for-action)

⁶ 1999, Collier P. Oxford Economic Papers, [On the Economic Consequences of Civil War](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxep/51.4.671)

⁷ 2020, UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](https://www.unama.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/afghanistan-annual-report-on-protection-of-civilians-in-armed-conflict-2020.pdf)

⁸ Ibid.

women and 760 children). There was a spike in terrorism since the last quarter of 2020, corresponding with the formal commencement of the Intra-Afghanistan Peace Negotiations. Ninety per cent of the victims of explosive remnants of war are children.⁹

At the micro level, conflict in Afghanistan is affecting the delivery of public services, lives, and livelihoods at all levels. In addition to creating fear and trauma, it has resulted in numerous civilian casualties and widespread destruction of infrastructure and essential facilities, including schools, hospitals and places of worship. By limiting government access, conflict has also reduced the rate at which maintenance activities can be carried out on the already inadequate public infrastructure, thus reducing its potential contribution to the economy and society.

AGEs have not confined attacks to the police or state apparatus. They have also targeted elected representatives, community leaders, humanitarian workers, social activists, and human rights defenders. Terrorism inflicts high costs, especially on educated and professional Afghan women in the health, education and judicial sectors.¹⁰ It deters women from taking up a professional career, depriving them of independent means of livelihood. It also limits opportunities for women to present themselves as role models for the next generation. Afghan Media

personnel have paid an increasingly heavy price since 2001, making Afghanistan one of the deadliest countries for reporters.¹¹

In 2019, more than 700 schools were destroyed, depriving 330,000 children of education. In 2021, personnel at the University of Kabul and dozens of pupils – mainly girls – from the minority Shia population of Hazara were killed by a targeted terrorist attack.¹²

There are regular attacks on health facilities that have resulted in deaths and injuries of medical personal and have reduced or eliminated access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls.¹³ There were 89 recorded attacks in 2020 across Afghanistan's provinces - likely an underestimation.¹⁴

Security remains the main challenge to the provision of justice services. Prosecutors, judges and justice sector personnel and institutions are primary targets of insurgents. In 2019 alone, there were 17 documented incidents of deliberate attacks against judiciary members that killed 19 prosecutors, 13 judges and judicial staff.¹⁵ These are significant numbers for the justice system in Afghanistan, considering that it did not exist before 2001. Insecurity is a major barrier to the deployment of prosecutors and judges and providing justice across the whole country. It enables AGEs to administer an alternative form of justice in the areas they control.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 2018, Human Rights Council, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective](#)

¹¹ 2020, NWA Online, [Mexico, Afghanistan in lead as killings of journalists double in '20](#)

¹² 2021, Reuters, [Bombers aim for buses in new tactic to spread death and fear in Afghanistan](#)

¹³ 2021, WHO, [SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM FOR ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE \(SSA\)](#)

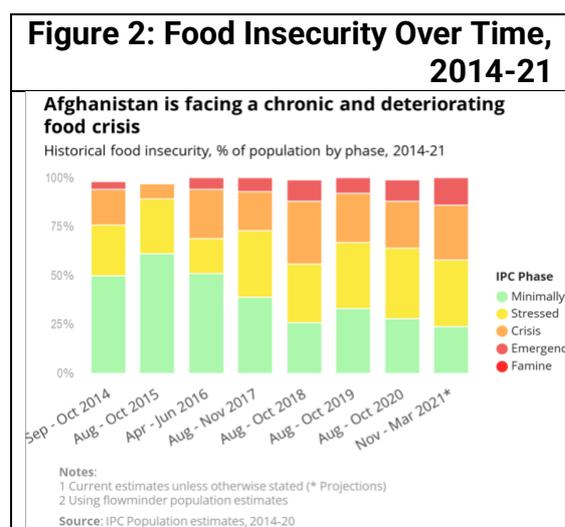
¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2020, UNAMA, [Afghanistan Protection of civilians in Armed Conflict](#)

Even after peace is achieved, casualties may continue to rise due to landmines planted across many areas in the country. Afghanistan has one of the highest levels of explosive hazard contamination globally¹⁶ due to explosive remnants from the use of improvised anti-personnel mines by AGEs.¹⁷

Any peace agreement is likely to produce complex challenges around the democratic process, the justice system, human rights and gender equality. Future challenges will depend on the terms of the agreement between the Government and the Taliban.

2. Humanitarian Situation



Afghanistan has needed humanitarian assistance for decades. Over the past five years, the food security situation has substantially deteriorated, with the

percentage of food-insecure people doubling from 2015 to 2020 (**Figure 2**). The 2019 Global Hunger Index places Afghanistan in the 108th position out of 117 countries.¹⁸

The situation has been aggravated by the natural increase in the population and the rising number of returnees. The protracted conflict and deteriorating climatic conditions have resulted in the internal displacement of large populations. More than 50 per cent of all Afghans have been forcibly displaced in their lifetimes¹⁹, and nearly 5 million of them remain displaced since 2012.²⁰ Since 2002, the UN has facilitated the voluntary return of over 5.2 million registered Afghan refugees, mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Since 2016, half a million undocumented returnees have entered the country annually. In 2020 alone, the number of undocumented returnees reached 870,000, many driven by the deteriorating economic circumstances due to the COVID-19 outbreak and health-related responses in their origin countries. Others have been deported back to Afghanistan. Practically all undocumented returnees need assistance.²¹

The need for humanitarian assistance has increased in the last year due to climate-related effects and the onset of the pandemic. The latest figures suggest that 17 million people (more than 40 per cent of the population) are

¹⁶ 2020, The Monitor, [Afghanistan Impact Report](#)

¹⁷ HNO 2021 UNAMA, op cit. From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 584 civilian casualties (323 killed and 261 injured) from pressure-plate IEDs (PPIEDs), of which 12 per cent were women and 31 per cent were children. This is a 44 per cent increase in civilian casualties from these devices compared with the first nine months of 2019.

¹⁸ 2021, Global Hunger Index, [Afghanistan](#)

¹⁹ 2016, UNCHR, [Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan](#)

²⁰ 2021, International Organisation for Migration, [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#)

²¹ 2021, Relief Web, [Humanitarian Needs Overview, Afghanistan](#)

facing acute food insecurity (IPC Phases 3 and 4)²², and 5.5 million are in an emergency food security situation (IPC Phase 4), the second-highest number of people in the world.²³ Even before the pandemic, Afghanistan was the third-worst country globally in terms of its food crisis in 2019.²⁴ Millions had been displaced two years earlier due to unseasonal heavy rainfall causing flooding in atypical locations or by drought. Afghanistan is one of the least prepared countries against climatic shocks and the 11th most vulnerable country in the world to climate change.²⁵

The lack of food security is associated with micronutrient deficiencies, particularly iron, vitamin A, vitamin D, zinc, and iodine, which are vital for health and development in women and children. As a result, more than 25 per cent of children are underweight. Over 40 per cent show signs of stunted growth – a rate that rises above 70 per cent in some areas. Across the country, 30 per cent of people consume less than 50 grams of protein per day in Afghanistan²⁶ and 27 of the 34 provinces have emergency levels of acute malnutrition.²⁷

Due to high rates of poverty, resilience to the shocks is limited. Even before the pandemic, more than 50 per cent of the population was below the poverty line

set as low as \$1 per person per day. More than 90 per cent lived on less than \$2 per person per day.²⁸ The poverty rate is higher among children below the age of 18 (at 56 per cent) compared to 49 per cent among people aged 18 and above.²⁹ It is also higher in rural areas where most of the population lives. While the poverty rate is below 20 per cent in Kabul, it rises to 61 per cent rural areas and more than 80 per cent in certain provinces (such as Nooristan and Badghis), reaching nearly 90 per cent among the Kuchi population.³⁰ Isolation creates challenges for assisting in hard-to-reach areas, even if assistance is available in the absence of conflict.

The Government has limited financial resources to provide humanitarian assistance. The social protection system is almost negligible considering the size and needs of the population. Only five per cent of largely inadequate health expenditures are spent on nutrition. The additional resources required for child nutrition interventions are estimated to be only \$10 per child annually.³¹ However, total spending on health is only \$80 per person per year. This amount presents a significant challenge given the number of children in need.³²

At the end of 2020, 18.4 million were already estimated to need

²² 2020, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, [Afghanistan, IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, August 2020 – March 2021](#)

²³ 2020, UNOCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview, Afghanistan](#)

²⁴ 2020, World Food Programme, [Proteus Composite Food Security Index for 2020](#)

²⁵ 2019, Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, [Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index](#)

²⁶ 2015, Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan, [Afghanistan: Sustainable Development Goals \(2015-2030\) \(Goals, Targets and National Indicators\)](#)

²⁷ Greater than 15 per cent wasting for children under five.

²⁸ 2019, Relief Web, [Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2018](#)

²⁹ 2020, UNICEF, [Child-centered, multi-hazard risk analysis.](#)

³⁰ 2019, World bank, [Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2018](#)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

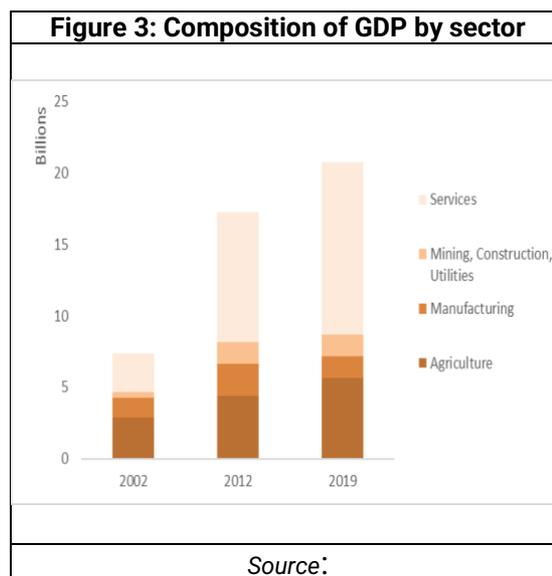
humanitarian assistance.³³ The resilience of households is likely to be reduced further as COVID-19 may push the poverty rate above 70 per cent.³⁴ The proportion of children suffering from wasting was 13 per cent in 2020 (up from 9 per cent in 2013). Before the pandemic, an estimated 690,000 children were affected by severe acute malnutrition. That number has since increased to 780,000 children. Responding to the humanitarian crisis is likely to require an additional \$1.3 billion in 2021 alone.³⁵ In addition, the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity may well double in 2021.³⁶ In June 2021, the Government announced that wheat production in 2021 was likely to be down 20 per cent due to drought.

3. Economic Overview

Structure of the economy

The economy remains largely informal across all three main sectors. Moreover, a large part of it is under the control of AGEs.

In terms of size, agriculture has lost its relative importance over time. Depending on weather conditions, it accounts for only 20 to 25 per cent of GDP compared to twice as much in the early 2000s (**Figure 3**). Opiates account for more than 10 per cent of GDP depending on weather conditions.



Agriculture accounts for 43 per cent of employment. Two-thirds of employed women work in this sector. It's also the most important source of income for 28 per cent of households yet contributes to revenues for 80 per cent of the population. Agriculture is based mainly on subsistence activities. Small farms undertake most agricultural production; those below four *jeribs* (0.8 ha) accounting for two-thirds of all farms.³⁷ About 60 per cent of agricultural land (3.7 million hectares) is dependent on seasonal rainfall and highly sensitive to changes in climate.³⁸ It is vulnerable to variations in the annual rate of precipitation. Extended droughts can reduce the amount of rain by 90 per cent.³⁹ Even irrigated arable land, which accounts for just 5 per cent of the total land⁴⁰, suffers from underinvestment in the required

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ 2021, OCHA, [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)

³⁵ 2021, Save The Children, [REVEALED: 10 MILLION AFGHAN CHILDREN NEED LIFE-SAVING HELP](#)

³⁶ 2020, World Food Programme, [WFP chief warns of 'hunger pandemic' as Global Food Crises Report launched](#)

³⁷ Policy Effectiveness Analysis (PEA-2019) draft report, Afghanistan, FIRST / FAO-EU

³⁸ 2013, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in Science, Colorado State University, [Erosion mapping and sediment yield of the Kabul river basin, Afghanistan](#)

³⁹ 2014, Remote Sensing of Environment, Volume 149, [Mapping Irrigated Areas in Afghanistan over the Past Decade Using MODIS NDVI](#)

⁴⁰ 2009, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, [National Adaptation Programme of Action](#)

infrastructure.⁴¹ A sizable part of the food supply is dependent on imports whose annual value reaches \$2 billion (10 per cent of GDP).⁴²

The share of the combined manufacturing and production industries (mining and quarrying, construction, and utilities) has also declined over time, reaching 18 per cent of GDP in 2019. Mining and quarrying are significant potential drivers for economic growth. Afghanistan is rich in mineral deposits (oil and gas, copper, coal, marble, iron ore, gold, and lithium). However, the sector contributes only 1 per cent to the official GDP partly because they are exploited under artisanal or illicit activities primarily overseen by AGEs.

Manufacturing is confined mainly to food processing by micro, small and some medium-sized enterprises. Flour milling is the largest agro-industry, where small mills (known as *asiabs* or *zirandas*) process 90 per cent of the domestic wheat production. Other manufacturing sectors have been slow to grow. Some of the most important sectors have experienced significant declines. In the second half of the 2010s, carpets, textiles, clothing apparel, leather products and wood products production, including furniture, reduced by much as 30 per cent on average.⁴³

Despite being essentially small scale, productivity in the industrial sector is

nearly three times higher than that in agriculture (Table 1). This discrepancy is similar across the services sector, whose share of GDP has been increasing over time. It reached 54 per cent in 2019. As nearly half of the population is engaged in agriculture where productivity is so low, this explains, in part, the high incidence of poverty.

Table 1: Sectoral Shares of Employment and GDP and Relative Productivity (%)			
Sector	Employment	GDP	Productivity
Agriculture	43	21	49
Industry	18	25	139
Services	39	54	138
Total	100	100	100

Source: World Bank.

The conflict has significantly shaped the current structure of the economy. However, there are other factors in operation. Only 30 per cent of land is registered in urban areas and 10 per cent in rural areas. Land registrations continue to be perceived as lengthy and costly. These perceptions can slow down or even prevent agricultural development and restrict access to credit. Lack of storage facilities and rudimentary transport constrain the circulation of agricultural products. Inadequate infrastructure and unreliable energy supply increase the cost. Investments in new technologies, from processing to management, have been low or largely absent.⁴⁴ As a result, much domestic production ends up with semi-finished goods having low

⁴¹ 2018, Central Statistics Organization, Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016-17](#) The 2016-17 Afghanistan Living Condition Survey estimates that 21% of irrigated land and 36% of rainfed land cannot be cultivated despite relatively good farming conditions.

⁴² HS code 02-23

⁴³ ICMPD, 2020

⁴⁴ 2021, World Bank, [Opportunity for Mobilizing Agribusiness Investments and Development](#) The *Opportunity for Mobilising Agriculture Investment and Development* project commenced in 2020 with funding from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is managed by the World Bank, attempts to address many of the identified constraints to food processing in Afghanistan.

value added. The task of finalizing production often falls on neighbouring countries that finish processing and packaging, thus appropriating most of the value of the output.⁴⁵

The national currency is overvalued because of the influx of foreign aid worth \$6–7 billion. This problem has raised the relative price of domestic products and encouraged imports. Remittances from Afghan migrant workers have, in recent years, averaged around \$800 million – almost equal to revenues from the export of goods.

The 2018 Afghanistan Opium Survey⁴⁶ showed that non-state actors and AGEs tax a sizeable part of the opium harvest. Poppies are a lucrative alternative for many. In 2018, farmers made \$604 million from poppies.⁴⁷ The opium poppy is more prevalent in villages outside government control. The Government struggles to provide oversight as unlicensed businesses account for approximately 20–30 per cent of financial flows. There is currently an unknown but considerable number of illegal “operations”.⁴⁸

Public Finances and Aid Dependency

The size of the economy is small. In combination with weak collection mechanisms, the Government's ability to finance its activities remains heavily dependent on foreign aid, a substantial amount of which is dedicated to security-related spending.

Though Afghanistan benefited from debt forgiveness in the 2000s, the public finance gap is one of the widest in the world. Donors continue to provide generous financial support as domestic revenues are inadequate for financing the \$11 billion public expenditures that account for over half of the GDP. Over three-quarters of costs are funded by foreign aid. Security-related spending absorbs over \$5 billion per year. Considerable aid income, in effect, finances the trade deficit, which amounts to \$6.5 billion in 2019 (\$5.9 billion for goods and \$0.6 billion for services).⁴⁹

	Security	Civilian	Total
Government expenditures	1.9	3.4	5.3
<i>Of which funded by:</i>			
- domestic revenues	0.7	1.8	2.5
- grants	1.2	1.6	2.8
Off-budget expenditures	3.7	2	5.7
Total	5.6	5.4	11
Source: World Bank (2019)			

Capital investments as a percentage of GDP peaked at 26 per cent in 2006 but have since declined. Investments in the agricultural sector have been steadily declining since 2014 to the point that they are lower than those required to cover the depreciation of the capital stock.⁵⁰ Even at its peak in 2005, foreign direct investment (FDI) was less than 5 per cent of GDP.

⁴⁵ 2013, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Afghanistan, [Implementing the SME Strategy Action Plan for Developing Afghanistan's Agri-Business Sector, 2011-2013](#)

⁴⁶ 2018, UNODC, [Afghanistan Opium Survey](#)

⁴⁷ 2018, UNODC, [Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security](#)

⁴⁸ 2019, International Monetary Fund, [IMF Country Report No. 19/382](#)

⁴⁹ 2021, National Statistics and Information Authority, [NSIA Website](#)

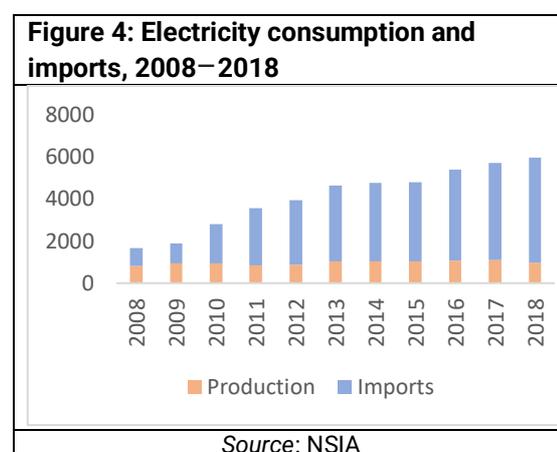
⁵⁰ Except for a small increase in 2009.

Foreign aid accounts for over 40 per cent of national income whilst total international support has been around \$8.5 billion per year. Security assistance amounts to \$5 billion per year, while civilian aid is around \$3.5 billion per year. In November 2020, donor countries pledged civilian aid of \$3.3 billion a year at the Geneva pledging conference. The decline is relatively small, but as crucial donor countries attached conditionalities to their pledges, the actual inflows might be less. The country urgently needs to prepare for expected further declines in foreign aid.

A peace agreement would allow resources allocated to security to be repurposed for economic growth and social development. Expected improvements in the management of revenues can also contribute to more effective use of public funds through transparent approval and implementation of the policies, programmes and projects as a recent Presidential Decree announced.⁵¹

A key sector for future economic growth is energy, where significant progress has been achieved. While less than 5 per cent of the population had access to electricity in 2001⁵², today 98 per cent have some electricity access. Although the grid covers only 25 provinces serving 35 per cent of people.⁵³ However, it is expected to “extend to all provinces” by 2021.⁵⁴ The

increase in electricity consumption has come primarily from imports (**Figure 4**). The Power Sector Master Plan 2012–2032 aims to increase the domestic production of electricity to reduce the reliance on foreign sources that have regularly been interrupted, resulting in power outages.⁵⁵ The Master Plan also aims to reduce user costs as the current local thermal power generation (diesel and furnace oil) is four to five times more expensive than imported power.



Another key sector is transport. More than half of the population lacks access to all-weather roads.⁵⁶ Though the Government spent, on average, around \$500 million annually on infrastructure-related projects through the national budget between 2009 and 2018, this amount has not produced commensurable results due to poor planning and governance. On the

⁵¹ DECREE of President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Establishment of High Council of Revenues Pursuant to provision of article 64 of the Constitution of Afghanistan, for the purposes of increasing and effective management of revenues, aimed at approving and endorsing policies, plans, strategies, projects and programs and for the purpose of implementing commitments of the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

⁵² IBID.

⁵³ 2015, Asian Development Bank, [North–South Power Transmission Enhancement Project, Sector Assessment](#)

⁵⁴ 2020, Relief Web, [Afghanistan National Peace and Development Plan II](#)

⁵⁵ In July 2020, Tajikistan stopped supplying electricity to Afghanistan. In December 2020 and January 2021, Uzbekistan halved its supply of electricity.

⁵⁶ 2021, World Bank, [Afghanistan Country Overview](#)

Logistics Performance Index⁵⁷, Afghanistan scores a low 1.9 out of 5. It is estimated that \$26 billion in transport infrastructure investment is required by 2035 to support sustainable development in Afghanistan.⁵⁸

Digital connectivity is another area with high returns to both the economy and to households. Although almost 70 per cent of the population registered as mobile phone users, over 80 per cent are offline and cannot participate meaningfully in the digital economy. Internet penetration is only 19 per cent compared to 32 per cent in Pakistan and 81 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁵⁹ Access is concentrated in urban areas, with rural regions benefitting little from digital technologies. Increased digital connectivity can accelerate economic growth and support social development. It will also promote private-sector efficiency and increase the efficiency and transparency of government operations, thereby reducing corruption.

The Rule of Law, Corruption and Governance

The constitution guarantees judicial independence. Article 2 of the 2004 Constitution recognizes Islam as the

state religion but protects religious freedom.⁶⁰ Article 22 of the Constitution is a non-discrimination clause stating that “the citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law.” The constitution also declares Afghanistan as an Islamic Republic and Sharia as the basis of the law. Thus, the current legal framework is a mixture of civil law and Sharia. A Conciliation Law seeks to connect informal and formal justice sectors.

Though prevailing insecurity is a significant challenge for the formal justice system, it has continued to expand, albeit slowly, into previously unreached districts.⁶¹ However, in rural areas where traditional values, religion and traditions are most respected, the traditional informal governance system is still widely practised, represented by the village *malik* and *mullah*. In the areas controlled by AGEs, this is the sole system through which justice is delivered, finances are raised, and society is regulated. UNAMA has identified several instances whereby cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments have been enforced due to decisions reached by informal justice mechanisms.⁶²

Trust in the informal justice system is high.⁶³ This fact may be related to the

⁵⁷ A measure of logistics professionals’ perceptions of a country’s quality of trade and transport related infrastructure.

⁵⁸ 2017, Asian Development Bank, [Afghanistan Transport Sector Master Plan Update \(2017-2036\)](#)

⁵⁹ 2021, Internet World Stats, [Alphabetical List of Countries](#)

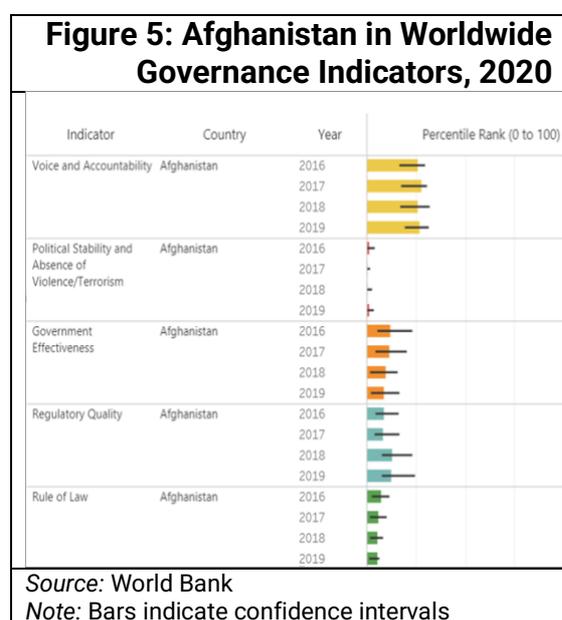
⁶⁰ There is no legislation that sets out the protections afforded to freedom of religion or belief for minorities. There is Afghan jurisprudence that establishes harsh penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, and these have been used to harass religious minorities. The 2018 Penal Code protects individuals’ rights to exercise their religious beliefs by criminalizing verbal and physical assaults on a follower of any religion while at the same time punishing those who direct insults or distortions towards Islam (including in cyberspace) with a one to five-year prison sentence. Blasphemy, by some interpretations of Sharia law, is deemed a capital offence.

⁶¹ For more information on districts where the Attorney General’s Office, Ministry of Justice, and Supreme Court have expanded in recent years, see [UNAMA reports on corruption](#).

⁶² 2019, UNAMA, [Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#)

⁶³ For previous years see: 2019, UNAMA, [Anti-Corruption Report](#)

perception that the formal legal system follows western values. Many see informal justice as more accessible, affordable and timely. In a survey, 80 per cent of respondents stated that they trust local *Shuras* and *Jirgas*, and 75 per cent said that these mechanisms are more effective in delivering justice.⁶⁴ In another survey, only two-thirds of respondents found state courts to be fair and trusted, and only half felt they were effective in providing just outcomes.⁶⁵



Afghanistan has drafted, promoted or passed over 580 laws and regulations. However, justice sector reforms have produced “moderately unsatisfactory” results.⁶⁶ As measured in the global governance index, the rule-of-law indicator has deteriorated over time, as has government effectiveness. Other indicators related to the rule of law are

among the lowest in the world – generally in the lowest 10 per cent of countries. The exception is the “voice and accountability” indicator that still places Afghanistan in the lowest quartile, though it has shown little sign of progress over time (Figure 5).

Recent attempts to regulate these informal justice mechanisms by requiring their decisions to be registered within the formal system have been unsuccessful. The rule of law remains weak, especially in rural areas, and is subject to corruption. The 2019 global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scored Afghanistan 173rd among 180 countries.⁶⁷ Afghans have consistently cited corruption as one of the biggest frustrations of their daily lives.⁶⁸ The value of bribes is estimated to be almost 9 per cent of GDP.⁶⁹

Corruption not only jeopardizes future financial support from donors but also reduces its impact. An analysis of how the donor funds for reconstruction were spent identified that 30 per cent were lost to waste, fraud, and abuse.⁷⁰

The Economic Impact of COVID-19

Though reported cases understate infections, the pandemic has inflicted a high toll on lives, livelihoods and the economy. Since the start of the pandemic, fewer than half a million tests have been conducted.⁷¹ As of June 4, 2021, 77,000 people across

⁶⁴ 2019, The Asia Foundation, [Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People](#)

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ 2018, World Bank, [Implementation Completion and Results Report](#)

⁶⁷ 2021, Transparency International, [Corruption Perceptions Index](#), accessed 1/12/2020

⁶⁸ Demonstrated consistently in the annual Survey of the Afghan People, carried out by The Asia Foundation from 2006 to 2020.

⁶⁹ 2020, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, [National Corruption Survey 2020](#)

⁷⁰ 2020, VOA News, [US Reportedly Lost \\$19 Billion To Fraud, Abuse in Afghanistan](#)

⁷¹ 2021, OCHA, WHO, [Afghanistan: Strategic Situation Report: COVID-19, No. 98](#)

Afghanistan have been infected. More than 3,000 have died, including nearly 100 healthcare workers.⁷² The small number of tests, the limited public health resources and the absence of a national death register suggest that the confirmed cases of and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be underreported. This estimation is corroborated by the very high positivity rate⁷³ of 44 per cent. Though Afghanistan went through a substantial first wave with an estimated over 30 per cent of the population infected,⁷⁴ the daily average number of people newly impacted (more than 1,500) in June 2021 has surpassed the numbers seen during the peak of the first and second waves.⁷⁵

The pandemic is also having a significant impact on the economy and livelihoods. According to the latest World Bank estimate, the economy contracted by 1.9 per cent in 2020. Moreover, it is projected to increase by only 1 per cent in 2021 and 2.6 per cent in 2022.⁷⁶ Additional economic impacts of the pandemic include the increase in food prices between 10 per cent and 30 per cent across different types of food; a reduction in domestic revenues by nearly 20 per cent; and a substantial increase in the overall deficit (from 0.8 per cent to 2.3 per cent of GDP). In addition, cross-border movement

restriction reduced trade substantially, though for a relatively short period.

Just before the pandemic, the urban poverty rate reached a new high of 45.5 per cent. It increased further to 55.2 per cent during the early phases of the pandemic.⁷⁷ This increase is due to the impact of lockdowns on urban employment, higher food prices, and loss of income. By the summer of 2020, farmers and herders faced difficulty in accessing seasonal agricultural inputs and markets.⁷⁸ The worst affected households exhausted their savings and consumed supplies stocked for the next season.⁷⁹ Eighty per cent of households reported having debts, whilst most said that their obligations had increased.⁸⁰ By November 2020, more than 40 per cent of the population faced acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and 4). Unemployment increased. And health services have been stretched with planned deliveries of essential services, such as vaccinations, being postponed.⁸¹

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Positivity rate is the number of positive tests as a percentage of total tests.

⁷⁴ 2020, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Public Health, [Prevalence of COVID-19 and its Related Deaths in Afghanistan: A Nationwide, Population-Based Sero-epidemiological Study July 2020](#)

⁷⁵ 2021, Al Jazeera, [Afghanistan faces vaccine delay as it battles COVID surge](#)

⁷⁶ 2021, World Bank, [Afghanistan Development Update, April 2021 : Setting Course to Recovery](#)

⁷⁷ IE&LFS2020/21 and WB 2021 April

⁷⁸ 2020, Afghanistan Food and Agriculture Cluster, [Afghanistan: Seasonal Food Security Assessment \(SFSA\) 2020 Report](#)

⁷⁹ 2020, Famine Early Warning Systems Network, [Afghanistan Food Security Outlook Update, April 2020](#)

⁸⁰ 2020, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, [Afghanistan IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis April 2020](#)

⁸¹ HMIS Q2 2020 versus Q2 2019

4. Social Overview

Population

The latest estimate of the population size is around 40 million.⁸² Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations in the world. A total of 63 per cent of the population is below the age of 25; 46 per cent is below the age of 15.⁸³ It also has one of the fastest-growing populations with an estimated fertility rate (TFR)⁸⁴ at 5.3 children per woman.⁸⁵ As a result, the population is increasing at an annual rate of nearly 2.2 per cent, although this is a significant reduction compared to the annual population growth rate of 4.2 per cent between 1991 and 2015.⁸⁶

The expected population growth adds pressure on the economy to provide jobs. Despite continuing reductions in the fertility rate, the Afghan population is expected to hit the 55 million mark by 2030 if fertility remains at 5.3. Thus, it would require an unprecedented increase in economic growth to prevent the per capita income from falling. Moreover, though most of the population still live in rural areas, the urban population grew at a rate of 4.5 per cent between 2000 and 2010 – one of the fastest recorded in the South Asia region.⁸⁷

Nearly five million Afghans remain internally displaced. Of those, 75 per cent have been displaced due to conflict and the rest due to natural disasters. In 2020, there were 400,000

new IDPs. Two-thirds of IDPs are displaced within their home province, and most of them reside in just eight provinces.⁸⁸ Another half a million Afghans are returning from abroad every year. As many as four million Afghans remain in neighbouring countries. Afghanistan also hosts a large number of refugees, more than 70,000 from Pakistan alone. Most of them lack access to essential services and employment.

On the positive side, the underlying population dynamics will reduce the share of young people under 15 years and raise the working-age population. These effects will increase the size of the labour force and its potential contribution to economic growth. The share of under-15s is expected to decrease to 43.5 per cent by 2030 while working-age populations rise to 53.7 per cent, as long as the fertility rate remains at 5.3.

Per capita incomes, inequality and poverty

After 2001, there was a rapid increase in GDP driven by the presence of international troops and substantial donor support. Per capita income more than doubled between 2001 and the early 2010s as GDP grew on average by 10 per cent annually until 2012. During this period, businesses providing services to international security forces, diplomatic missions, and aid projects drove rapid economic expansion. The per capita income

⁸² 2020 Afghanistan Population Projection and its impact on development by UNFPA & NSIA, based on Flowminder modelling method and constant fertility scenario of 5.3.

⁸³ 2014, Central Statistics Organization, Afghanistan

⁸⁴ World Bank Group, 2015

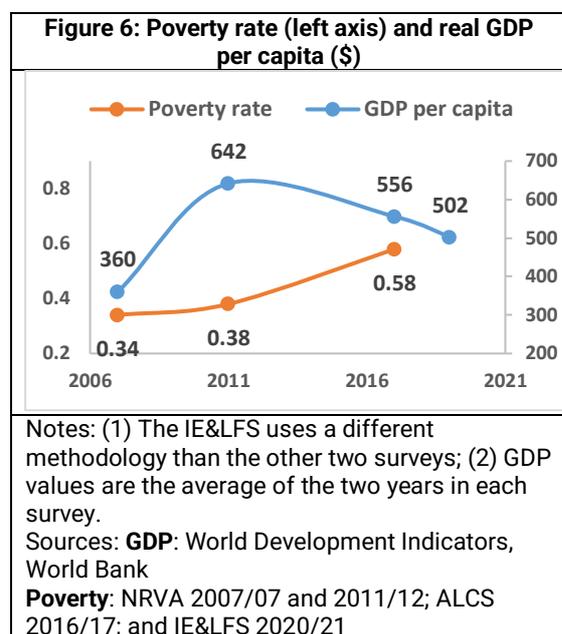
⁸⁵ 2015, Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, [2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey \(AfDHS\)](#)

⁸⁶ UN. 2015. p: 3

⁸⁷ 2021, World Bank, [Leveraging Urbanization in Afghanistan](#)

⁸⁸ Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Helmand, Jawzjan Kabul, Kandahar and Nagarhar.

increased by 75 per cent over this period. However, the economy became highly dependent on foreign aid.



The poverty rate has been increasing even during these high economic growth years (**Figure 7**). The growth momentum was lost when the presence of international forces began to decline in 2012. As a result, the rate of economic growth reduced significantly to around 2 per cent.⁸⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in negative growth in 2020. The incidence of poverty is expected to have increased by ten percentage points bringing it closer to 70 per cent.

Today, per capita income is about \$500, making Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world.⁹⁰ Around 81 per cent of the population lived on less than \$0.74 per day (\$3.20 per day in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms) before the COVID-19 crisis. Even the

incomes of the top 5 per cent of the population average \$2.02 per day (\$8.74 per day at PPP). Unsurprisingly, this relatively small income difference between the poorest and the rich is reflected in several indicators. For example, the share of children aged between 6 and 23 months who have not consumed iron-rich foods in the previous 24 hours is practically the same among the poorest (quantile 1) and those in quantile 4 (74 per cent and 73 per cent). Rates among the wealthiest households (quantile 5) are as high as 62 per cent.⁹¹ The Gini coefficient is relatively low, where zero indicates that incomes are shared equally and one indicates income accrues to one individual. Since the late 2000s, its value has oscillated around 0.3, with inequality in rural areas being four percentage points lower in rural areas than in urban areas.⁹²

The Labour Market

In Afghanistan, those in employment are a small fraction of the total population. Low employment rates are affected by the country's young population structure and the low rates of women in employment who are often engaged in unpaid production and care activities at home. The share of Afghan women in unpaid domestic work and care is 67 per cent compared to 12 per cent for men.⁹³ Women spend 18.7 hours a day caring for others, preparing food, and cleaning compared to 5.6 hours for men.⁹⁴

With half of the population being younger than 15 years, the dependency

⁸⁹ 2021, The Diplomat, [Rahimi, L. Thinking More Deeply About Human Development in Afghanistan](#)

⁹⁰ In current US dollars. Source: World Development Indicators.

⁹¹ IRA: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2017.

⁹² 2021, Income, Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, figure 5.6.

⁹³ 2018, Central Statistics Organization

⁹⁴ 2020, UN Women, [The Impact of COVID-19 on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work in Afghanistan](#)

ratio is very high at 105 per 100 working-age individuals. People above the age of 65 account for less than 3 per cent of the population.⁹⁵ The total labour participation rate is only 42 per

cent amongst the working-age population. For men, the rate averages 68 per cent. For women, the rate is 17 per cent. Table 3 provides the breakdowns by sex and geography.

Table 3: Size and Rate of Labour Force Participation by Sex and Residence, 2020/21 (IE&LFS 2020/21)

Residence	In Thousands			In Percentage		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
National	7020.8	5615.2	1405.6	41.9	68.4	16.5
Urban	1576.6	1344.2	232.4	35	60.2	10.2
Rural	5072.3	3997.6	1074.8	43.9	71	18.2
Kuchi	371.9	271.9	98.5	53.6	78.2	28.6

The labour force comprises seven million workers, of whom only 5.7 million are employed. Employers are a tiny fraction among them. Only 1.8 per cent of men and 0.7 of women own and run only 3 per cent of registered enterprises.⁹⁶ Three out of four are employees or own-account workers – 83 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women. The unpaid workers total 20 per cent of the employed, of whom 80 per cent are women. Given the total population of 40 million, the implication is that those who are paid support 6.5 persons. If wages are the only source of income for a household, their level should be at least Afs 15,000 (\$195) to achieve the minimum level of consumption required to avoid poverty. Actual average monthly wages of those

between the ages of 20 and 59 years are Afs 12,000 (\$156) for men and Afs 6,000 (\$78) for women.

Women have made inroads into the labour market. There are now nearly 1 million female workers (compared to 5 million men) with relatively high shares to total employment in craft and related trades workers (33 per cent) and professional workers (22 per cent). Men tend to take up jobs in the armed forces, elementary occupations, technicians and managerial positions.⁹⁷ The highest share of women in employment can be found in manufacturing, where they outnumber men by nearly ten per cent (54 per cent to 46 per cent).⁹⁸ This share is partly because most manufacturing involves food processing and handicrafts that resemble women's traditional tasks at home.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey

⁹⁶ Latest official figures available from Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce & Industry (AWCCI).

⁹⁷ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, Tables 3.8.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Tables 3.6.

⁹⁹ World Bank, 2018.

Location	Women	Men	Total	% women
Subnational level	51,895	250,682	302,577	17
Central level in Kabul	35,025	66,549	101,574	34
Total	86,920	317,231	404,151	21
of whom				
- Teachers	66,076	137,125	203,201	32
- contract workers	7,457	75,640	83,097	9

Source:

Since 2008, policies have been in place to increase the number of women in the civil service. Of the 400,400 government employees in 2018/19,¹⁰⁰ 21 per cent were women.¹⁰¹¹⁰² Among female government employees, 76 per cent are teachers (Table 6). Women constitute 10 per cent of decision-makers¹⁰³ and other civil servants, where teachers are excluded. The revision to the Civil Servants Law (2018) allows for women (and also people with disabilities) to be granted extra points in competitive merit-based recruitment processes.

Comparing the mean-wages gender ratio to median wages suggests that in all occupational categories, save three, most of those with lower salaries are women. The balance of female-to-male median wages is lower than the corresponding ratio for mean wages (Table 7). Women's wages are significantly lower than men's. Average monthly earnings among those between 20 and 60 years of age are Afs

6,000 for women and Afs 12,000 for men.¹⁰⁴

	Mean	Median
Managers	100%	80%
Professionals	150%	130%
Technicians	70%	60%
Clerical support workers	130%	100%
Service/sales workers	140%	150%
Skilled agricultural workers	190%	160%
Craft and related workers	400%	500%
Plant and machine operators	120%	330%
Elementary occupations	160%	130%

Source: IE&LFS2020/21, Table 3.8

Despite the continuing violence against legal personnel (that mainly targets women), 8 per cent of prosecutors and one-third of administrative staff in the Attorney General's Office (AGO) are women,¹⁰⁵ as are 12 per cent of judges in the Supreme Court¹⁰⁶. Women are also leading nine of the AGO's directorates.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ 2019, National Statistics and Information Authority, [Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19](#)

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁰² 2020, Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, [IARCSC Annual Activity Report for 1398 \[2019/20\]](#)

¹⁰³ 2017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Status Report on the Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 \(Women, Peace and Security\)](#)

¹⁰⁴ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, Tables 3.10.

¹⁰⁵ 2019, UNAMA, [UNAMA Anti-Corruption Report](#) p. 41-42.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ 2018, Ministry of Finance, [Comprehensive Agriculture Development National Priority Program](#)

There are 1.3 million unemployed and an additional 1.2 million time-related underemployed. These two numbers amount to a labour underutilization rate of 36 per cent ranging from almost 30 per cent in urban areas to nearly 40 per cent in rural areas. The total unemployment rate of 19 per cent in 2020 increases to 24 per cent for boys and 32 per cent for girls. The rate of youths not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is 14 per cent for males and 53 per cent for females. The urban unemployment rate is 21 per cent. In rural areas, unemployment is at 18 per cent, varying from 11 per cent in summer to 27 per cent in winter. Engaging in unpaid work and staying in the household, rather than acting autonomously, provides a degree of security from external threats, risks and hazards.¹⁰⁸ The Kuchi population are engaged almost exclusively in self-employment and family work. As a result, they have the lowest rates of both unemployment and underemployment.

At the current small size and rate of utilization of the labour force, the estimated 400,000 to 430,000 annual increase in labour supply presents a significant challenge.¹⁰⁹ The challenge can become even more acute if numbers of the internally displaced and returnees increase further. Under the current and projected economic growth rates in the coming decade, labour demand is unlikely to absorb a rapid increase in supply. To the extent that it does, it will be primarily in vulnerable and subsistence jobs.

Education

Since 2001 the Government has rebuilt and expanded the education system. Previously excluded, 40 per cent of students are now girls. Enrolments, especially for girls, have benefited from community-based education (CBE). The results are evident when we compare the literacy rate of young Afghans, which stands at 54 per cent, to the 36 per cent of older generations. However, the latest data in the Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys (IE&LFS 2020) suggest that there has been a significant slowdown in improving the education indicators. Noting that the Kuchi population is almost totally outside the education system, the net attendance is only 44 per cent for primary education, 33 per cent for secondary, and just under 7 per cent for tertiary education. The gender gap in education enrolments has narrowed, although 60 per cent of out-of-school children are girls. The ratio of girls-to-boys is 72 per cent for primary, 60 per cent for secondary and 45 per cent for tertiary education. As the IE&LFS 2020 concludes, an international comparison “indicates that Afghanistan is still among the poorest performers in providing adequate education to its population” (p. 119).

Still, the extent of progress is considerable in terms of both institutional improvements and quantitative outcomes. A 2001 *Back-to-School* campaign preceded the 2004 Constitution and the Education Law of 2008 that established “free education until the bachelor’s level” as a right of all citizens. The National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III, 2017–2021)

¹⁰⁸ 2019, Pain, A. Relief Web, [Growing out of poverty? Questioning agricultural policy in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁰⁹ National Statistics and Information Authority, 2019

stressed the need for education for all, prioritising quality, relevance, equitable access and efficient and transparent management.¹¹⁰ A National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) aims to create a modern, well-educated workforce that promotes the sciences, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM). It also hopes to improve governance, quality assurance and accreditation systems as priorities.¹¹¹ Revisions in the curriculum, alongside new measurable learning outcomes for each grade and level, are expected to strengthen the quality of education. A National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan (NAFA) has now been endorsed. These efforts are complemented by the cooperation with international partners and several NGOs through a coordination platform.¹¹²

Despite the recent increase in poverty and rise in violence, education enrolments have reached unprecedented levels. The school population has risen eight-fold, from less than 1 million in the early 2000s to 9.2 million students (38 per cent girls) by 2018.¹¹³ In parallel, the number of schools is now more than 16,500. Another 8,000 are planned across the country to attract the hundreds of thousands of still out-of-school children (OOSC) in remote and socially conservative areas. The increase at the tertiary education level has been even higher. There were only 22,000 university students in 2002, but their number had reached 400,000 by 2018 – a 20-fold increase. This increase is

partly due to the emergence of private institutions accounting for nearly half of all tertiary enrolments (up from none in 2002).¹¹⁴

There have been several additions to primary and formal education, though they remain underdeveloped and have yet to produce large-scale results. A Basic General Literacy Program (BGL) offered literacy courses to 200,000 adults, mostly in major cities, of whom nearly half were females. Though still in its early stages, Family Life Education (FLE) is a critical vehicle for addressing attitudes around gender, violence and other fundamental social issues. It provides information, builds skills and shapes values that enable young people to make informed choices about their health and family life. Topics covered include relationships, gender norms, puberty, reproductive health, pregnancies, human rights, stigma and discrimination. The number of educational centres and institutes offering technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has increased from only 42 to more than 300, enrolling over 63,000 trainees. These figures are expected to increase further, reaching out to provinces.¹¹⁵ Equally important, the TVET Authority is developing an ambitious 10-occupational-cluster training program to establish standards in line with the needs of the labour market.¹¹⁶

Had it not been for the continuing conflict, outcomes could have been better. Violence has adversely affected the education sector in several ways.

¹¹⁰ The NESP is currently being revisited for 2021 to 2030, with largely similar priorities.

¹¹¹ Ministry of Higher Education, 2015

¹¹² Ministry of Education, 2020

¹¹³ 2018, World Bank, [Afghanistan Education Management Information Systems : SABER Country Report 2017](#)

¹¹⁴ 2020, UNESCO, [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) report, 2020](#)

¹¹⁵ Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority, 2019

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Targeted attacks, the most recent of which killed dozens of pupils and girls from a minority Shia group (Hazara), make parents unwilling to send their children to school. Girls are particularly affected. Save the Children has estimated that between 2017 and 2019, there were more than 300 attacks on schools. As many as 800 schools were closed due to insecurity as of December 2020, affecting 340,000 students, of whom one third were girls.¹¹⁷ There have been widespread reports of military use of educational facilities and schools destroyed by election-related violence. As many as 7,000 schools in the country remain without buildings and students often take classes in religious schools.¹¹⁸ Overall, conflict makes even approved plans and investments challenging to implement. Violence disproportionately affects girls and increases female teachers' reluctance to be deployed in insecure areas. Most girls drop out of school after primary education.

High rates of poverty also harm school enrolments. Parents from low-income families find it harder to send their children to school, especially as children become increasingly able to work. The low completion rates are telling in this respect. Of those enrolled, only 67 per cent of boys and 40 per cent of girls attend primary school until the final grade. Rates in lower secondary education are 49 per cent for boys and 26 per cent for girls. And they are further reduced at the upper secondary education level reaching 32 per cent for boys and only 14 per cent for girls.¹¹⁹ In

addition, absenteeism rates are high, with 22 per cent of registered children in primary schools being permanently absent.¹²⁰

Table 8: Effect of one year of additional education on earnings

	Worker Earnings		On Family Incomes	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Country				
Afghanistan	1.3	3.0	2.3	3.2
Bangladesh	5.9	9.9	6.0	8.4
India	7.4	8.9	6.0	7.8
Iran			8.2	7.5
Pakistan	10.7	18.1	3.9	7.0
Sri Lanka	8.9	11.2	5.3	6.3
Region				
EAP	9.2	10.1	6.6	6.6
ECA	7.0	9.3	4.8	5.3
HI	9.4	11.2	5.2	5.2
LAC	8.6	10.5	6.4	6.8
MNA	6.5	11.1	5.6	6.6
SA	6.9	10.2	4.7	5.5
SSA	11.3	14.5	7.4	7.6
World	8.4	11.0	5.8	6.2
Source: Tzannatos, Zafiris; Ishac Diwan and Joanna Abdel Ahad (2016). ¹²¹				

Though education is free until the tertiary level, it has high indirect costs at lower levels. The most important one is the foregone earnings (in money or kind) of working children upon which many families depend. Families can resist the pressure of earning immediate income if they feel that keeping their children in school will increase their future income. That is, at least to the point where a child's expected earnings exceed the costs of educating them. This consideration is particularly relevant in Afghanistan,

¹¹⁷ Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (2020)

¹¹⁸ 2020, Tolo News, [Ansar, M. No Buildings for 7,000 Afghan Schools: Ministry](#)

¹¹⁹ 2019, UNICEF, [The State of the World's Children 2019](#)

¹²⁰ 2019, Ministry of Education, Joint Education Sector Review Report

¹²¹ 2016, Economic Research Forum, Tzannatos, Zafiris; Ishac Diwan and Joanna Abdel Ahad, [Rates of Return to Education in Twenty Two Arab Countries: An Update and Comparison between MENA and the Rest of the World](#)

where households mainly consist of extended families and children are seen as “old age security” in place of pensions.

The current state of the labour market in Afghanistan does not encourage investment in education. Afghanistan has the lowest rate of return to education; each additional year increases an individual worker’s earnings by only 1.3 per cent for men and 3 per cent for women. The impact on family incomes is only a fraction of that in neighbouring countries and is, in fact, the lowest in the world (Table 4). The contribution of educated workers to family incomes is not much different and, again, it is among the lowest in the world. The inability to better utilize the increasingly educated youth may prove to be one of the most binding constraints to the future growth in Afghanistan.

While the benefits of peace may be slow to manifest, there are issues that the education system can address from a sectoral perspective. One such issue is education quality. Proficiency in language and mathematics for Afghan students in grade six is equivalent to that of grade four students in Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kazakhstan.¹²² The general lack of textbooks is a severe challenge for the sector, as is the lack of proper facilities and materials.¹²³ Almost all of the 800,000 children living with disabilities (95 per cent) lack access to education. This deficit is commonly due to a lack of access to buildings, curricula or teachers that meet their needs.¹²⁴

Lagging learning outcomes and lack of qualified teachers can be addressed, primarily through appropriate teacher training and qualifications. However, nearly 60 per cent of teachers are merely grade-12 graduates. Furthermore, teachers are not systematically assessed. Half of them are deemed to be underqualified, especially among those in remote areas.¹²⁵

The many challenges that prevent girls from attending schools would also need to be addressed. The OOSC study noted that while attacks on mixed schools accounted for 32 per cent of all attacks, attacks on girls’ schools accounted for 40 per cent. The number of girls’ schools, which can reduce the objections by families to let them enrol in education, are only 16 per cent of all schools. Long distances from home, lack of female teachers, poor perceptions of the value of girls’ education and harmful social norms, such as child marriage, are all factors that contribute to the low enrolment rates and high drop-out rates among girls. The presence of female teachers can be particularly encouraging for the girls’ school enrolment, attendance and retention. Still, female teachers are only 36 per cent on average, ranging from as low as 2 per cent in some areas to as high as 74 per cent in others.¹²⁶

Financial sustainability poses an additional challenge. In 2020, the national budget allocated 11.6 per cent to education – a significant amount corresponding to around 3 per cent of

¹²² 2016, Australian Council for Educational Research, [Class 6 Proficiency in Afghanistan 2013: Outcomes of a Learning Assessment of Mathematical, Reading and Writing Literacy](#)

¹²³ 2017, World Bank, [Afghanistan Education Management Information Systems : SABER Country Report 2017](#)

¹²⁴ 2019 Ministry of Education, Joint Education Sector Review Report

¹²⁵ Ibid

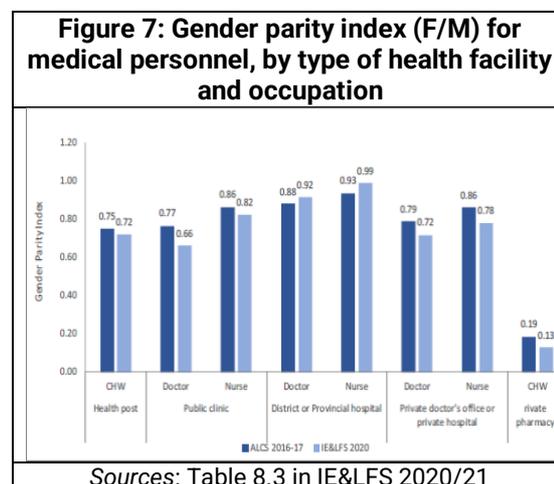
¹²⁶ World Bank, p.29.

GDP.¹²⁷ However, the current allocation constitutes a decline from previous levels compounded by inefficient resource management.¹²⁸ Salaries make up more than 90 per cent of education spending. External assistance provides one-third of the public expenditure on education. Most donors channel funding for education through a \$ 325 million multi-donor pooled funding, on-budget programme,¹²⁹ consistent with aid effectiveness and Global Partnership for Education (GPE) principles.

The challenges education faces in Afghanistan are enormous. The education supply is very low, unequally spread across the country, of low quality, and in need of financial resources and financial management. The demand for education by families is adversely affected by poverty, norms and a lack of apparent economic value. Conflict amplifies these effects, restricting the reach of public education and subjecting education to what is locally, rather than nationally, acceptable. Addressing these issues calls for stakeholder engagement at all levels. As in the past, there should be a jointly agreed, coordinated and consistent effort over time between the Government, its local partners and the international community. Engagement with religious figures and AGEs, which has recently generated a willingness to support education, should be continued and encouraged.

Health

The last two decades have seen increasing healthcare coverage across the country and several health indicators. Public health services have expanded substantially under challenging circumstances, with a focus on primary health care. The majority of the population (80 per cent) are within two hours of a public clinic. Still, only 67 per cent live less than two hours from a district or provincial hospital, with 10 per cent being more than six hours away. There have been significant decreases in infant, child, and maternal mortality rates. Life expectancy at birth has increased to 62 years.¹³⁰ The Basic (BPHS) and Essential (EPHS) Package of Health Services form the backbone of the health system through well-defined health service delivery packages that is nevertheless almost entirely financed by donors. In 2020 the national budget allocated 4.1 per cent to health.¹³¹



There have also been improvements in other areas. Access to improved water

¹²⁷ 2019, World Bank, [Afghanistan: Public Expenditure Update](#)

¹²⁸ Ministry of Education

¹²⁹ 2015, Education for Development, [Strand, A. Financing Education in Afghanistan: Opportunities for Action](#)

¹³⁰ 2010, World Bank, [Afghanistan Mortality Survey](#)

¹³¹ 2020, Ministry of Finance, budget documents

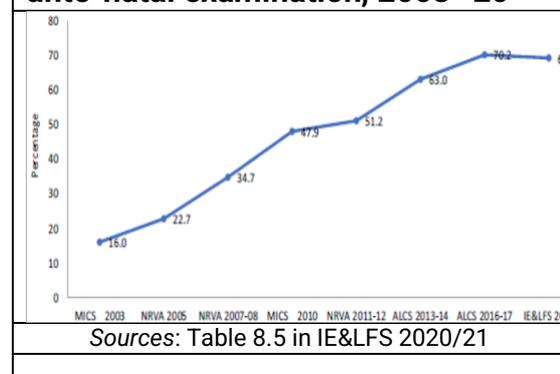
services has increased from about 27 per cent in 2000 to 67 per cent in 2019.¹³² The incidence of malaria has been reduced. Though polio is yet to be eradicated, efforts continue despite opposition by non-state actors. Polio Supplemental Immunization Activities (SIAs) have resumed after a pause due to COVID-19.

A positive development has been the increased number of women workers in the medical professions (**Figure 7**). The uptick is a critical factor for increasing women’s access to health services and facilities where cultural norms dictate that contact with men in whatever capacity be generally avoided. Such standards are more common in rural areas, where 75 per cent of the female population live, especially in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected regions. Only 30 per cent of people here have access to essential health services.¹³³ The effect of cultural differences is amplified by the unequal geographic distribution of medical facilities. Nationally, two-thirds of births are assisted by medical personnel (9 per cent by doctors and 53 per cent by midwives or nurses). The remaining 38 per cent of deliveries take place at home, ranging from 12 per cent in urban areas, 41 per cent in rural areas and 69 per cent in the Kuchi community.

The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among all married women (age 15–49 years) is around 20 per cent. In this respect, Afghanistan has one of the highest unmet needs for family planning (26 per cent). This is due partly to conservative cultural beliefs.

However, on the positive side, there is a national commitment to reduce the unmet need for family planning to 15 per cent by 2021.

Figure 8: % of women who had an ante-natal examination, 2003–20



The percentage of pregnant women who had at least one ante-natal examination has increased from 16 per cent in the early 2000s to 70 per cent by 2020, though only 28 per cent had four or more visits by a skilled health care provider in 2020 (**Figure 8**).¹³⁴ The share of births attended by trained medical personnel rose from 17 per cent to 62 per cent. Two-thirds of deliveries now take place in public hospitals or clinics and private health facilities.¹³⁵

Another challenge for Afghanistan is to cater adequately for the needs of persons with special needs. It has the world’s largest population share of people with disabilities. The prevalence rate of disabilities is 3.1 per cent of the population, though this is officially acknowledged as an underestimate.¹³⁶ The most common cause of disability is reduced physical mobility followed by impaired eyesight. One in four persons with a disability has multiple

¹³² JMP 2019, WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, P. 135.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Tables 8.5 and 8.10.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 135.

disabilities. Disability rates vary across the population. The share is 24 per cent in urban areas, 29 per cent in rural areas, and 10 per cent among the Kuchi population. This percentage increases at older ages, though it is higher among young children than adults. Generally, there are few differences between both sexes.¹³⁷

In 2020, self-reported disability prevalence among displaced households was higher than national averages at between 8 and 17 per cent.¹³⁸ This figure refers to physical disability and does not account for the impact of decades of conflict, natural disasters, and poverty on mental health. In addition, between 2.5 and 2.9 million Afghans use some sort of narcotic drug. Between 1.9 and 2.3 million use opiates.¹³⁹

Persons with disabilities are vulnerable and often marginalized. Only 28 per cent of people with disabilities above eight years old could read and write a simple text (33 per cent among males and 19 per cent among females).¹⁴⁰ Only 17 per cent of youth with disabilities participate in education and training.¹⁴¹ The unemployment of persons with disabilities was 38 per cent in 2016 compared to the national average of 24 per cent. The cause of disability attracts public stigma.¹⁴² While disability resulting from an accident or violence does not generally

invoke negative public attitudes and can even attract social assistance, those born with an impairment are sometimes considered cursed. Families tend to hide such persons from the outside world to protect the individual and preserve the family reputation.¹⁴³

Health financing is stressed and likely unsustainable. Foreign aid funds support most health services. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (around \$1.2 billion per year) has funded 90 per cent of essential health services and education. At the micro-level, out-of-pocket expenses (OOP) account for most of the health expenditures. Whilst user fees are not charged at public facilities, per capita, OOP expenses account for \$61 of the total health spending, averaging \$81 per capita.¹⁴⁴ Public funds do not generally cover medicines and other health-related costs.

Afghanistan's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) remains amongst the highest in the world. Moreover, only half of children between the ages of one and two are fully immunized. Immunization rates are low because house-to-house vaccinations may be restricted in AGE-controlled areas if not banned altogether. Polio has now spread to eight new provinces. There has also been an outbreak of type two poliovirus following a spill-over from an episode in

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ 2020, REACH Initiative, [Whole of Afghanistan Assessment \(WoAA\) 2020 Province Factsheet Booklet, August-September 2020](#)

¹³⁹ 2015, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL)

¹⁴⁰ 2008, Birkbeck University of London, [Trani JF, Bakhshi P. Challenges for assessing disability prevalence: The case of Afghanistan](#)

¹⁴¹ 2017, Government of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17](#)

¹⁴² 2012, Cambridge Journal of Education, [Trani JF, Bakhshi P, Nandipati A. 'Delivering' education; maintaining inequality. The case of children with disabilities in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁴³ 2006, Handicap International, [Bakhshi P, Trani JF, Rolland C. Conducting surveys on disability: A comprehensive toolkit](#)

¹⁴⁴ 2019, Ministry of Public Health, [National Health Accounts](#)

Pakistan. Tuberculosis remains a major public health issue. Afghanistan remains a high malaria burden country.¹⁴⁵ Over 77 per cent of Afghans live in at-risk areas; 27 per cent live in the six high-risk provinces. And only one in four households – 4 per cent of the population – have insecticide-treated mosquito nets (ITN).¹⁴⁶ Access to safe water varies significantly between urban and rural areas, provinces, and households, depending on economic status. For example, access to safe drinking water in urban areas is nearly universal (96 per cent) compared to 57 per cent in rural communities.

Social protection

Social protection can support several SDGs, both from a development/human capital perspective and a welfare/humanitarian perspective (Table 5). Afghanistan has some of the lowest numbers of social protection policies globally, as well as some of the lowest spending rates on social protection.¹⁴⁷ A Social Protection Indicator (SPI)¹⁴⁸ on spending in Afghanistan was 0.04 in 2010.¹⁴⁹ This figure contrasts unfavourably with the Asian regional average of about 3.7.

Table 5: Social Protection Measures Support a Multiple of SDGs	
Objective	Goal
Tackle poverty and inequality	SDG 1, SDG 10
Strengthen food security Goal 2	SDG 2

Improve health and cognitive development	SDG 3, SDG 9
Strengthen education outcomes	SDG 4
Promote gender equality	SDG 5
Household-level environmental management	SDG 6, SDG 13
Strengthen social inclusion and cohesion	SDG 11, SDG 16
Decent and productive work; inclusive growth	SDG 8
Improve macroeconomic resilience	SDG 12
Opportunities for development partnerships	SDG 17

Source: UNICEF (2019)

The social protection system in Afghanistan is small and covers relatively few people. Formal social security consists of only three programmes covering public sector employees and families affected by conflict.

Moreover, the lack of childcare and eldercare has direct implications on the capacities of women to engage in productive activities. A recent survey by UN Women showed that, on average, the surveyed women spent 4.6 hours per day on unpaid childcare (compared with 2.3 hours for men) and 3.4 hours

¹⁴⁵ 2019, World Health Organization, [World Malaria Report](#)

¹⁴⁶ 2015, Demographic and Health Surveys, [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#)

¹⁴⁷ 2017, International Labor Organization, [World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

¹⁴⁸ The SPI assesses social protection systems against several indicators to generate a ratio, which is expressed as a percentage of GDP per capita.

¹⁴⁹ 2021, Asian Development Bank, [Social Protection Indicator](#)

on caring for others (compared with 1.3 hours for men).¹⁵⁰

The Public Sector Pensions Programme (PSP) is the only social insurance programme in the country with around 115,000 recipients, pensioners and their survivors.¹⁵¹ It developed from an older pension scheme from the 1990s and covers civil servants, the military, public bank employees, families of martyrs and persons with disabilities.¹⁵² The PSP grants eligible pensioners monthly retirement payments tied to beneficiaries' former salaries.¹⁵³

According to the latest available data, the Martyrs and Disabled Pension Programme (MDPP) reaches just over 310,000 recipients and targets those affected by conflict. It offers unconditional cash transfers ranging from AFN 400 to AFN 500 (\$5–6) per month and health care, education fee waivers, and housing and transport subsidies for persons with disabilities.

The Citizen's Charter, National Priority Programme (CCNPP) – Social Inclusion Grant (SIG) targets the most vulnerable households in the community (the "very poor" category) through a matching grant of up to \$2,000 per community. The funds, jointly provided through community philanthropy, are used to set up a grain bank, and the grain bank's allocations are then determined by the Community Development Committee (CDC).

Given the average household size of 7.7 members and assuming that households have only one beneficiary from these programmes, the latter two programmes potentially reach 3.5 million individuals (respectively 2.4 million, 900,000 and 250,000 million) though not all of them being poor. Zakat, one of the Five Pillars of Islam and a prominent form of almsgiving funded as a religious mandatory charitable contribution and equivalent to a tax the wealthy to help the needy, reaches 1.5 per cent of the population.¹⁵⁴ Afghanistan has yet to develop programmes to provide conventional social insurance benefits such as unemployment, sickness, and maternity.

As with education and health, existing programmes are supported mainly by external assistance, both on and off-budget. The Government often cites the challenges of financing and operating social protection as a reason for the limited social protection system.¹⁵⁵ However, a review of the national budget suggests an upward trend in government expenditure toward social protection.¹⁵⁶ If economic growth resumes at a relatively high rate, Afghanistan has an opportunity to build an adequate social protection system. The process must start with a national social protection floor that would provide minimum support to the most vulnerable on an assistance (tax-financed) basis. Programmes can then

¹⁵⁰ 2020, UN Women, [The Impact of COVID-19 on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² 2012, Independent Evaluation Group, [Labib, A.M. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: Updating and Improving the Social Protection Index \(Technical Assistance Consultant's Report\)](#)

¹⁵³ 2018, Independent Evaluation Group, Twigg, J.L, [AF: Pension Admin and Safety Net \(P113421\) Report Implementation Completion Report \(ICR\) Review No. ICRR0021279\)](#)

¹⁵⁴ 2018, Central Statistics Organisation, [Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17](#)

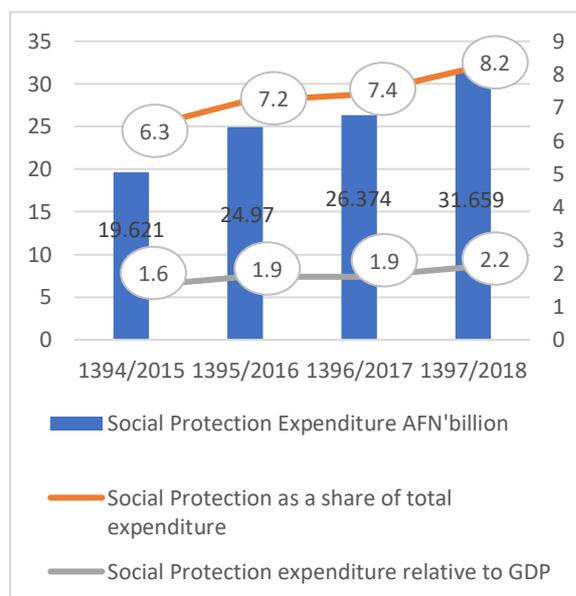
¹⁵⁵ 2017, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021](#)

¹⁵⁶ UN calculations using budget books

expand active labour market programmes and introduce new social insurance programmes. However, such responses can only resume once the size of the formal labour market increases and it becomes possible to collect contributions from employers and workers.

Simulations show that comprehensive social assistance programmes may cost Afghanistan only about 4.5 per cent of GDP.¹⁵⁷ At that budget, programmes could cover child-headed households, female-headed households, persons with severe disabilities and the elderly (above 65 years), as well as shock responses to lean seasons and early disaster response. This approach is not only feasible but would provide seasonal work to nearly four million workers. Outcomes include support to almost one million older adults, 110,000 people with disabilities, 260,000 female-headed households and about 355,000 child-headed households.

A less ambitious programme could focus on short-term solutions to the recent drought and the COVID-19 pandemic. It could also offer a social pension of Afs 1,000 to 800,000 pensioners (excluding the Public Sector Pensions Program). The annual cost would be minimal, amounting to only 0.6 per cent of GDP. Another social assistance programme could transfer cash to 760,000 Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees, also at a rate of Afs 1,000. Again, the annual cost would only be 0.6 per cent GDP. Finally, social protection could be offered to one million beneficiaries for 75 days (3 months) a year. At a daily wage set equal to the poverty line (\$1 per person per day), it would require a financial outlay of 0.3 per cent of GDP (\$66 million). These three programs can be introduced relatively quickly, especially the social pension. Their total cost comes 1.5 per cent of GDP, excluding administrative costs.¹⁵⁸



Gender

There has been considerable progress made in education, health, employment, political participation, gender equality and women’s roles in peace talks in the last 20 years.¹⁵⁹

The representation of women in political life has expanded. The constitution reserves 27 per cent of

¹⁵⁷ 2019, World Food Programme, [Afghanistan: Developing a Strategic Framework of Action for Social Protection](#)

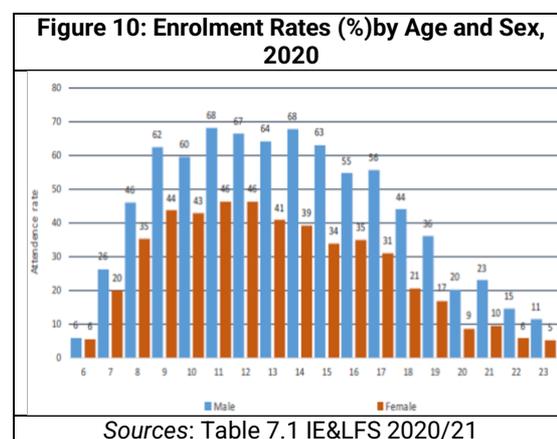
¹⁵⁸ 2021, UNDP, [Achieving Afghanistan’s Long-term Goals amid Short-term Adversities](#)

¹⁵⁹ Afghanistan has a tradition of a “third gender” (individuals who identify outside categories of male and female) that is not legally recognized and function only at the margins of society and are mainly hidden and

parliamentary seats for women¹⁶⁰ who currently hold just over that share (28 per cent)¹⁶¹. Of the 250 seats in the *Wolesi Jirga*, 68 are reserved for women. The *Meshrano Jirga* should have 102 senators, with 34 elected from Provincial Councils and 34 nominated by the President (50 per cent of whom must be women). Since no district council election has been held, the 34 from these councils have been absent since 2014. Their seats remain vacant.¹⁶² Among the positions that have been filled in the Provincial Councils, there is one female chairperson and two female deputies. Seven provincial council secretaries are women. Less than 1 per cent of the merit-based recruited district governors are women. None of the 34 appointed provincial governors are women.

In elected provincial councils, the share of women is 20 per cent below the threshold mandated by the constitution. The National Solidarity Programme (now replaced by the Citizen Charter) covers both rural and urban communities. The 50 per cent target of women’s participation in development councils has been met, with 49 per cent of panels in villages and 46 per cent of panels among the Kuchi (pastoral and nomadic) communities composed of women.¹⁶³

Women’s representation in formal peace efforts has increased over the past decade. Women-led networks and civil society actors have played a critical role in this.¹⁶⁴ Women constituted 20 per cent of the 2010 *National Consultative Peace Jirga*, while there were nine women among the 64 members in the High Peace Council. They have also participated in the dialogues that took place in Norway, Doha and Moscow. The 21-person Islamic Republic negotiation team in 2020/21 talks between the Government and the Taliban includes four women.¹⁶⁵



Though there has been progress, there remain significant gender gaps. A most measurable and telling indicator is the gender gap in education and its relationship with early marriages

publicly. There is little information on LGBTI individuals who face threats from family and society, are discriminated against including in health services and employment, and can be exposed assaults, threats, rape, blackmail, arrest, persecution, execution and killings.

¹⁶⁰ 2015, University of Bonn, [Afghan Women’s Representation in Politics: Implementing the Reserved Seats Quota System](#)

¹⁶¹ 2020, World Bank, [Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments \(%\)](#) Accessed on 1 June 2020.

¹⁶² Before 2014 President Karzai allowed a second representative from the Provincial District Councils in lieu of the district council representatives.

¹⁶³ 2020, Afghanistan Analyst’s Network, [AAN Dossier XXVI: Big Tent ‘Democracy’ – Afghanistan’s loya jirgas](#)

¹⁶⁴ In a Security Council briefing on the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 (2000), Zarqa Yaftali (Executive Director of Women and Children Legal Research Foundation) capturing this urgency to safeguard these gains called on the Council’s political support in ensuring that “these rights are not snatched away”.

¹⁶⁵ Initially, five women were appointed. At the time of writing, the composition of the negotiating team is 4 women of 21 total.

(Figure 10). Despite impressive gains since 2001, fewer girls enrol in schools at all levels of education than do boys. Of the 3.7 million children out of school, 60 per cent are girls.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, early marriage is an ongoing barrier to education. Forced and child marriage remain widespread, with harmful practices such as *ba'ad* (the exchange of girls for dispute resolution) and *badal* (exchange marriages). Nearly 30 per cent of women are married before the age of 18. Four per cent are married before the age of 15.¹⁶⁷ The pandemic is expected to fuel yet more early marriages.¹⁶⁸

Women's agency and autonomy are compromised by unequal economic rights such as inheritance or owning property.¹⁶⁹ Fewer than 2 per cent of rural women – predominantly widows – own land.¹⁷⁰ Women still have limited decision-making authority, freedom of movement and financial independence. These challenges impede their ability to counter widespread discrimination and human rights abuses, including harmful traditional practices such as “honour” killings and underage and forced marriages.¹⁷¹ Moreover, women may be aware of their rights but be reluctant to exercise them due to cultural norms or intimidation.¹⁷² There is widespread cultural acceptance of violence by men that is often considered a “private family matter”. Most Afghan women

(80 per cent) think it's acceptable for a husband to beat his wife under certain circumstances, a share that is 72 per cent among men.¹⁷³

From a human rights perspective, the Penal Code and other legislation still include problematic provisions. For example, the Penal Code allows so-called “virginity testing” upon a woman's consent and court order. However, such tests continue to be undertaken, often with little option for women to provide consent. International bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have long called for such tests to be prohibited as a grave violation of women's rights and a form of gender-based violence.

The legal improvements on paper since the early 2000s have not been fully translated into results due to weak implementation, particularly in rural areas and areas controlled by AGEs. As a result, women and girls are broadly disadvantaged and have inferior development opportunities across all life domains.¹⁷⁴ They have less access to government offices and services, low awareness of state institutions¹⁷⁵, and little knowledge of their rights, particularly regarding divorce or domestic violence. The majority of women (62 per cent) do not have a

¹⁶⁶ 2018, Ministry of Education, UNICEF, [Hall, S. All in School and Learning: Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study](#)

¹⁶⁷ 2016, UNICEF, [Child marriage is a violation of human rights, but is all too common](#)

¹⁶⁸ 2020, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, [Gender Alert on COVID-19 in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁶⁹ 2016, Asia Foundation, [A Survey of the Afghan People](#) Women hold less than one per cent of urban land, and two per cent of farmland. See women landowners are predominantly widows.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ For further information consult: 2021, UNICEF, [Gender focus: Gender equality for girls and boys](#)

¹⁷² 2014, World Bank, [Terasawa, M. Gender Dynamics in Access to Justice in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁷³ 2015, Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health, ICF, [Afghanistan Demographic And Health Survey](#)

¹⁷⁴ 2017, Government of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17](#)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

tazkira (national identification card) – a percentage that reaches 80 per cent among the internally displaced women. A lack of documents deprives them of access to voting, financial resources, humanitarian aid, health services, justice and freedom of movement. In 2019, Afghanistan was among the countries with the highest rates of women’s rights violations globally, ranked 170 out of 189 countries on the global Gender Development Index.

Domestic violence ranks high among the problems reported by women and is followed by concerns about lack of women’s rights, forced marriages and poverty.¹⁷⁶ Women-headed households are 60 per cent more likely to be food-insecure than male-headed households.¹⁷⁷ Women experience alarming levels of intimidation, public harassment, threats and targeted assassinations when they work.¹⁷⁸ Violence against women is used to threaten and silence them and limit their rights to free and full participation, freedom of expression, safety and privacy.¹⁷⁹ Though the reported cases may not fully account for the number of women experiencing violence,¹⁸⁰ one study found that more than half (53 per cent) of Afghan women have

experienced at least one form of domestic violence in their lifetime¹⁸¹. Another study puts this ratio at 87 per cent.¹⁸²

The violence experienced by Afghan women is frequent, severe, and of multiple forms: physical, sexual, economic and psychological. There is an entrenched culture of impunity regarding violence against women, as well as low law-enforcement capacity. While laws are in place that should stop violence against women, the rule of law is weak in many areas, and informal mediation is typical, preventing women’s access to justice and perpetuating impunity for the perpetrators. The impact of violence on women and girls (VAWG) may be amplified through conflict and the advent of the pandemic.¹⁸³ The incidence of gender-based violence has doubled since the beginning of COVID-19.¹⁸⁴

Other manifestations of violence against women and girls include so-called honour crimes, rape, sexual harassment, self-immolation and self-harm following experiences of violence. Violence against women and girls can escalate to femicide, the

¹⁷⁶ 2016, Asia Foundation, [A Survey of the Afghan People](#)

¹⁷⁷ 2020, Food and Agriculture Organisation, Food Security Cluster, World Food Programme, [Afghanistan: Seasonal Food Security Assessment \(SFSA\) 2020 Report](#)

¹⁷⁸ For one example, see Violence against Women in Afghanistan’s 2018 Parliamentary Elections, UN Women and Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) (2019) and Violence Against Women in Elections in Afghanistan: An IFES Assessment, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2019).

¹⁷⁹ 2018, Human Rights Council, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective](#) A/HRC/38/47.

¹⁸⁰ 2008, Global Rights: Partners for Justice, [Living with violence: A national report on domestic abuse in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁸¹ 2015, Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health, ICF, [Afghanistan Demographic And Health Survey](#)

¹⁸² 2008, Global Rights: Partners for Justice, [Living with violence: A national report on domestic abuse in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁸³ 2020, UN Women, [Gender Alert on COVID-19 in Afghanistan, Issue II: Ensuring Access to Services for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

¹⁸⁴ 2020, Oxfam, [A New Scourge to Afghan Women: COVID-19](#)

murder of women and girls. Women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are at increased risk of experiencing violence. Marginalized groups include internally displaced women, women living in conflict-affected areas, ethnic minorities, older women, women with physical or intellectual disabilities or those living in rural and remote areas. They're also less likely to receive the support they need.¹⁸⁵

Access to justice for women and girls experiencing violence is minimal. Only 20 per cent of victims seek support from service providers, often due to shame, fear of reprisals, and lack of knowledge on how to access available help.¹⁸⁶ Lack of assistance is another reason. Such services are available in only a few provinces and urban areas, with limited coverage in rural and remote areas. Survivor Support services tend to be underfunded, understaffed, poorly trained, and lack coordination with other services.¹⁸⁷

In a survey conducted in 2020, when asked if they agree or disagree that women should have access to leadership roles, in all cases, a majority responded that they strongly agree.¹⁸⁸ In another survey, two-thirds of respondents stated that they would oppose a peace agreement that endangered women's education or their ability to work outside the home.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, there is consensus that international assistance is essential to national recovery and that external support is conditional to the continuing progress of women's rights and gender equality.

The Youth

The youth (ages 15–24) comprise the majority of the population, with 63 per cent. There is a national youth strategy. However, implementation is weak. Young people lack “meaningful inclusion in peace processes, in humanitarian action, as well as the protection of ‘civic and political spaces’, where the vast majority of young peacebuilders operate”.¹⁹⁰ Disempowered and often impoverished, boys risk involvement with narcotics and other illicit trade or AGEs through radicalization.

Yet, several local peace initiatives involve youth, including peace declarations articulated by youth across Afghanistan.¹⁹¹ They could offer an entry point to express the youth's desire for peace and productive roles in Government or Taliban negotiating teams. Young people have a long-term vision perspective and broader concerns, especially with regards to the environment.

¹⁸⁵ 2020, UN Women, [COVID-19 and Essential Services Provision for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

¹⁸⁶ 2015, Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health, ICF, [Afghanistan Demographic And Health Survey](#)

¹⁸⁷ 2020, UN Women, [Gender Alert on COVID-19 in Afghanistan, Issue II: Ensuring Access to Services for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

¹⁸⁸ 2020, The Asia Foundation, [Afghanistan Flash Surveys on Perceptions of Peace, Covid-19, and the Economy: Wave 1 Findings](#)

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ 2020, Interpeace, [Simpson, G, Altiok, A. A Brief Analysis of New UN Security Council Resolution 2535 on Youth, Peace and Security](#)

¹⁹¹ UNAMA Local Peace Initiatives on Youth Declarations.

Children

The situation of children does not provide much promise for the future of Afghanistan. In 2018 one-third of children (3.7 million) were out of school, with 60 per cent of them being girls (2.2 million).¹⁹² Many boys find themselves recruited as combatants.¹⁹³ Over 15 per cent (1.8 million) of children below 18 are working. That remains at seven per cent in urban areas, 14 per cent in rural areas and 28 per cent among the Kuchis. The percentage of working children in the 15 to 17 age group rises to 30 per cent.¹⁹⁴ Three-quarters of working children are thought to be engaged in hazardous work, with boys being more exposed to it than girls, especially in urban areas (80 per cent versus 50 per cent).¹⁹⁵ The most common hazardous conditions they face are extreme cold, heat and humidity; dust and fumes; and heavy loads.¹⁹⁶

The conflict in Afghanistan is considered to be the world's deadliest for children.¹⁹⁷ In 2020, one-third of those injured or killed in the period from January to September were children. Thousands have been maimed since 2005.¹⁹⁸ Afghanistan is one of the few countries with rates of orphaning

reaching 10 per cent.¹⁹⁹ Nearly 60 per cent of the internally displaced are children, as are also 43 per cent among the returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran. In some provinces populated with internally displaced persons, girls are reported to be sold at prices ranging from Afs 150,000 to Afs 300,000 (\$2,000 to \$4,000). In several communities, sexual violence, also against boys (*ba'ad, bacha bazi*: child sexual abuse between men and boys) and child trafficking are not uncommon. These incidences are not always considered a crime in some communities and tend to go unreported. Those who do report them may be subject to intimidation.²⁰⁰

The incidence of poverty is higher among children compared to the rest of the population. Available (pre-COVID-19) data show 56 per cent of children (0–17 years) lived in poverty compared to less than 50 per cent among the adult population.²⁰¹ Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation remain serious concerns. These threats often arise from poverty, harmful socio-cultural norms, natural disasters and ongoing conflict.²⁰² Analysts estimate that 74 per cent of children aged between 2 and 14 experience violent discipline, including psychological violence.²⁰³

¹⁹² 2019, UNICEF, [Preserving Hope in Afghanistan](#)

¹⁹³ From 2011 to 2020, an estimated 2,261 boys have been recruited by AGEs and pro-government armed forces (PGFs).

¹⁹⁴ 2021, Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, Table 3.17.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Table 3.22.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Figure 3.21.

¹⁹⁷ 2020, OCHA, [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)

¹⁹⁸ 2020, Save the Children, [KILLED AND MAIMED: A generation of violations against children in conflict](#)

¹⁹⁹ 2008, World Bank, [For Protection and Promotion : The Design and Implementation of Effective Safety Nets](#) p. 358

²⁰⁰ 2019, Al Jazeera, [Amnesty urges release of Afghan men who exposed paedophile ring](#)

²⁰¹ 2019, National Statistics and Information Authority, [Afghanistan multidimensional poverty index](#)

²⁰² 2019, UN Security Council, [Report of the Secretary General to the United Nations Security Council, Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan](#)

²⁰³ 2013, Central Statistics Organization, [Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011](#)

Only one-third of infants aged 6–8 months are given complimentary food. Only half of children between one and two years old are fully immunized. Malnutrition, especially during the winter months, contributes to child mortality of 60 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to the regional average of 40 deaths.²⁰⁴ One in four children below the age of five are underweight, with stunting reaching more than 70 per cent in some provinces. According to Afghanistan’s National Nutrition Survey (NNS), many children have vitamin deficiency; the rate reaches 50 per cent in the case of Vitamin A among children aged 6–59 months.

The health of Afghan girls is of particular concern, especially for reasons related to underage marriages. Thirty-six per cent of girls enter into marriage by the age of 18 and experience early motherhood.²⁰⁵ Early marriage contributes to high maternal and infant mortality rates. The risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes for child mothers below the age of 20 is double that of women aged between 20 and 24 years.

Of the 18 million Afghans needing humanitarian assistance in 2021, 9.7 million are children. More than 300,000 children are facing illness and death due to winter conditions.²⁰⁶ The polio vaccination programme was halted in the early stages of the pandemic. Most

health services have been redeployed to deal with the effects of COVID-19.²⁰⁷

Children between the ages of 12 and 18 can bear criminal responsibility.²⁰⁸ Many Afghan children deprived of their liberty in Juvenile Rehabilitation Centers (JRC) are victims of child abuse and exploitation rather than offenders.²⁰⁹ They are arrested and detained instead of being provided with the support they need. The staff-to-child ratio in detention centres does not allow for consistent oversight, monitoring and supervision of children and juveniles, particularly at night, potentially exposing these children to substantial risks.

Similarly, child victims of human trafficking and boys exploited for *bacha bazi* (armed conflict) are routinely prosecuted and convicted instead of offered victim support services. Such outcomes also apply to children involved in the cultivation or smuggling of illicit narcotics. According to reports by NGOs, child trafficking victims are kept in juvenile detention centres, sometimes for several years. They are considered criminals even after being transferred to rehabilitation centres.²¹⁰ Children detained on security-related charges are often deprived of legal assistance, and many experience torture or ill-treatment.²¹¹ There have been no prosecutions of Afghan National Police officers for using torture. International minimum standards require that, in any judicial

²⁰⁴ 2020, UNICEF, [Levels and trends in child mortality 2020](#)

²⁰⁵ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey ,Table 2.6.

²⁰⁶ 2021, East Oregonian, [Billions in Aid Needed to Help Afghan Kids](#)

²⁰⁷ 2021, OCHA, [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan Summary 2021](#)

²⁰⁸ Ibid, Article 5.

²⁰⁹ 2013, UNICEF, [Access to Justice for Children](#) p.11. Some of the children were held in detention for offences such as homosexuality, debauchery and running away from home.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p.13.

²¹¹ Ibid.

proceedings against children, they should be treated as victims needing rehabilitation and reintegration.²¹² Advocacy is underway to include child protection concerns in the agenda of the current peace negotiations.

The Kuchi Community

An estimated 1.5 million Afghan nomads (Kuchi pastoralists) constitute the largest minority group in Afghanistan. Compared to the national adult literacy rate of 36 per cent, the rate among the Kuchis averages 6.5 per cent. That figure goes as low as 0.9 per cent among women.²¹³ While half of the rural population owns irrigated land, the percentage of Kuchis who do so is only 8 per cent. The average size of their irrigated land is only 1.8 *jeribs* compared to the national average of nearly five *jeribs*.²¹⁴ On the other hand, the Kuchis own more livestock, notably goats, sheep, camels and horses.²¹⁵ However, their seasonal migration routes are gradually being eroded.

Kuchis live in the margins of society. Few have a bank account (0.2 per cent), and less than 2 per cent have access to the internet. Few of them are reached by international donor assistance. Their water supply comes mainly from springs, wells and surface water, which is often contaminated. Sewage facilities are minimal. Their access to essential health services is limited. On average, Kuchi women receive only one of four recommended

ante-natal check-ups. Around 70 per cent of children are born at home compared to 41 per cent in other rural areas. Only 10 per cent of them registered at birth.

The vast majority are classified as poor (88 per cent).²¹⁶ Seventy-one per cent suffer from food insecurity (compared to the national average at 59 per cent), including 19 per cent who suffer from severe food insecurity (the national average at 14 per cent). The prevalence of undernourishment is 15 per cent.²¹⁷

Among the Kuchi population, there are 12 per cent more males – a difference of 85,000 people. Most of them are below the age of 15 (70,000).²¹⁸ Only 5 out of 100 Kuchi boys and one out of 100 Kuchi girls attend education, compared to the national gross attendance rates of 63 per cent for boys and 44 per cent for girls.²¹⁹ The youth literacy rate is low – 10 per cent for boys and 1 per cent for girls compared with, respectively, 66 per cent and 32 per cent in other rural areas.²²⁰

The share of Kuchi children engaged in household work is the same as that of other population groups. However, 24 per cent carry out some economic activity compared to 10 per cent of rural children and 3 per cent of urban children. The share of Kuchi children engaged in hazardous activities is 10 per cent higher than the national

²¹² 1990, OHCHR, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

²¹³ 2021 Income Expenditure and Labor Force Survey, Table 7.6.

²¹⁴ Ibid. Table 4.1.

²¹⁵ Ibid. Table 4.11.

²¹⁶ Ibid. P. 200.

²¹⁷ Ibid. Table 6.1.

²¹⁸ Ibid. P. 15.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Table 7.1.

²²⁰ Ibid. 7.6.

average.²²¹ The percentage of those not in employment, education or training (NEET) reaches 52 per cent among the Kuchis compared to the national average of 34 per cent (T 3.13).

The labour force participation rate among the Kuchis is 68 per cent compared to 47 per cent in other rural areas. While only 16 per cent of urban women and 22 per cent of rural women are in the labour force, that share reaches 46 per cent among Kuchi women – with other rural women being in the middle (18 per cent).²²² Practically all Kuchi men work (90 per cent) compared to the national average of 72 per cent. However, there are no employers and employees among the Kuchis: three-quarters are family workers, and the remainder are own-account workers.²²³ The unemployment rate at 5 per cent is half the national average and one-third of the rate in urban areas.

Land

In combination with the effects of urbanization, climate change, earthquakes and competition around land and housing, increasing populations and continuing conflict have increased displacement. In turn, land disputes reinforce conflict, lead to disputes between communities and tribes. These often lead to criminal violence.²²⁴ Land disputes are

reinforced by interpersonal conflicts and, more seriously, inter-communal conflicts. The number of such problems has been rising nationally, as have land prices since the early 2000s.²²⁵

More than 80 per cent of the land remains unregistered. Thirty per cent is registered in urban areas and only 10 per cent in rural areas.²²⁶ The Afghanistan Land Authority estimates that more than 1.2 million *jeribs* (240,000 hectares) have been usurped by state actors, armed groups, or sometimes both. Afghan returnees and the internally displaced may also find that others have occupied their properties.²²⁷ With weak land administration, judicial processes are lengthy and costly.

Moreover, there is a conflict arising from the blurred jurisdictions between formal and informal jurisdictions. The 2004 constitution of Afghanistan prohibits forceful or wrongful eviction from or deprivation of property, as well as a legal right to obtain its restitution.²²⁸ Other constitutional provisions support these rights.²²⁹ While the 1977 Civil Code governs land and property matters, in practice, the formal justice system uses a combination of the Civil Code, Sharia law and other legislation such as the Land Management Law of 2008.

²²¹ Ibid. Tables 3.19 and 3.21.

²²² Ibid. Table 3.15

²²³ Ibid. Table 3.9.

²²⁴ 2015, USIP; 2009 AREU; 2019 World Bank

²²⁵ 2003, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unity Wily, L.A., [Land Rights in Crisis, Restoring Tenure security in Afghanistan](#) (See also, Wil, L.A. 2004, 2013; Asia Foundation 2019)

²²⁶ 2019, World Bank

²²⁷ 2013, LARA; 2015 USIP

²²⁸ 2004, constituteproject.org, [Afghanistan's Constitution of 2004](#), Article Four

²²⁹ Ibid, see Articles 22, 24 to 27, 29 to 32, 39 and 39.

Laws and regulations governing forced displacement before 2001 don't apply to asylum seekers and the internally displaced. The Government adopted a *Refugee Return and IDP Sector Strategy* in 2008. In 2015, it established the High Commission on Migration and the International Quadripartite Leading Committee to coordinate the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) implementation. Voluntary repatriation and reintegration are its strategic priorities.²³⁰

The Environment

Many Afghans treat environmental risks as though they were natural and unavoidable events. Yet as the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates, the severity, frequency and impact of environmental hazards are increasingly shaped by globalization. It is essential to distinguish between the environment as a source of risk due primarily to climate change and the environment as a system at risk due to unconstrained human pressure and rapid population increase.

Afghanistan is amongst the countries most affected by natural disasters worldwide. It is second only to Haiti in the number of fatalities in the last four decades. Since 1980, disasters caused

by natural hazards have affected 9 million people and caused over 20,000 deaths.²³¹ Afghanistan is classified as one of four "fragile" countries in Asia that accounted for 55 per cent of the region's climate-related deaths between 1997 and 2016.²³² In 2018, Afghanistan ranked 168th out of 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), representing a drop of 5 positions over the last ten years. The change indicates that environmental health and ecosystem vitality are declining. The 2020 Global Climate Risk Index ranked Afghanistan as the world's 24th most vulnerable country.²³³ According to the 2020 Ecological Threat Register,²³⁴ Afghanistan has the highest exposure to ecological threats globally and is ranked last among the 141 countries assessed.

There is a natural disaster in Afghanistan every year. Perhaps the most imminent kind of natural disaster is drought.²³⁵ More than half of the provinces (18 out of 34) are drought-prone and have at least one district where more than 60,000 people are exposed to high drought frequency.²³⁶ Almost all years since 1997 have seen drought in some parts of the country, and drought frequency has increased, affecting millions of people, from farmers' incomes to hikes in food

²³⁰ ANPDF.

²³¹ 2018, Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, *Afghanistan Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction*

²³² 2018, OECD, *States of Fragility 2018* p.12.

²³³ 2018, Germanwatch, *Global Climate Risk Index: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2018 and 1999 to 2018*

²³⁴ 2020, Institute for Economics and Peace, *Ecological Threat Register*

²³⁵ See for example: 1994, American Meteorological Society, *Natural Disaster Reduction and Global Change*; 2007, Earth Science Reviews, Cook, E. R., R. Seager, M. A. Cane, and D. W. Stahle, *North American drought: Reconstructions, causes, and consequences*; 2010, Journal of Hydrology, Mishra, A. K., and V. P. Singh, *A review of drought concepts*; 1994 Obasi, Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society *WMO's role in the international decade for natural disaster reduction*

²³⁶ 2016, UNICEF, Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, *Country Specific Background Paper on Drought: AFGHANISTAN*

prices for all Afghans.²³⁷ Droughts between 2000 and 2011 affected 6.5 million people during four major events.²³⁸ Historically, severe droughts occurred every quarter of a century in every part of the country. In the past 20 years, there has been a severe drought every 5–8 years.²³⁹ Several studies project that the frequency and severity of droughts will increase. Temperatures are projected to rise, driving greater variability in spring rainfall. The result will be droughts that occur every 3 to 4 years rather than today's seven years. The results will include water shortages, land degradation and lower crop yields creating food shortages.²⁴⁰

During the winter of 2017–2018, one of the most extreme drought events in Afghan history occurred. Water deficits reached 70 per cent across the country. Wheat production was 57 per cent below average, and the 2018 harvest was even lower. Most provinces (22 out of 34)²⁴¹ were severely impacted, and with them, one-third of the population (10.5 million).²⁴² It led to population displacement whose number, estimated at 300,000, exceeded the number of conflict-induced IDPs in

several areas. In 2019, flash floods and landslides impacted one million people, while the current drought in 2020/21 is likely to affect 15 million people.²⁴³



Afghanistan in Winter

A drought of average severity causes an estimated \$280 million in economic damage, mainly in agriculture. A 'once in a decade' drought can cause agricultural losses of \$2.5 billion.²⁴⁴ The losses from an extreme drought can reach \$3.5 billion.²⁴⁵ The 2008 drought necessitated two million tons of cereals to be imported, costing \$1 billion.²⁴⁶ The 2017/18 drought resulted

²³⁷ 2020, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, [‘Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030](#)

²³⁸ 2018-2028, 2017/18, ANDMA Strategic Framework. This is quoted from: GFDRR. 2017, The World Bank, *Disaster Risk Profile: Afghanistan*, which cites: Université Catholique de Louvain, Guha-Sapir D., Below R., and Hoyois Ph., [EM-DAT: International Disaster Database](#),

²³⁹ 2017, Université Côte d’Azur, [Assessment of climate change impacts on water resources and agriculture in data-scarce Kabul basin, Afghanistan](#)

²⁴⁰ 2011, Weedon, G. P.; Gomes, S.; Viterbo, P.; Shuttleworth, W. J.; Blyth, E.; Österle, H.; Ad-am, J. C.; Bellouin, N.; Boucher, O.; Best, M. Creation of the WATCH Forcing Data and Its Use to Assess Global and Regional Reference Crop Evaporation over Land during the Twentieth Century. *J. Hydrometeorol* 823–848

²⁴¹ 2019, OCHA, [2019 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)

²⁴² 2020, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, [Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030](#)

²⁴³ 2019, UNICEF, [Afghanistan takes major step to address undernutrition](#)

²⁴⁴ 2017, World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery, [Disaster Risk Profile of Afghanistan](#)

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ 2016, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, *National Irrigation Programme*

in food price hikes of 300 per cent. As temperatures rise due to climate change, the situation can worsen, causing higher evapotranspiration rates, less soil moisture, and hardened soils.²⁴⁷ Rising temperatures also melt the snow and create flash floods.

Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to rising temperatures.²⁴⁸ It has already experienced an increase of nearly 2C in its mean annual temperature.²⁴⁹ Since the 1950s, there has been a significant decline in spring precipitation, reaching almost 40 per cent in the central highlands. Annual droughts in many parts of the country are likely to become the norm, affecting the entire population. Precipitation is forecast to decline by 26 per cent by the 2050s.²⁵⁰ There can also be episodic heavy precipitation leading to flash floods and landslides. As per OCHA reports, on average climate-related disasters affect more than 200,000 people a year and have resulted in more than 20,000 casualties since 1980.

Earthquakes regularly hit the country.²⁵¹ Many occur every year,

causing loss of life and infrastructure damage²⁵² costing \$80 million per year.²⁵³ The mountainous areas (more than 60 per cent of the country) are prone to landslides and avalanches, exposing over 3 million people and \$6 billion worth of assets and affecting 10,000 km of roads, particularly in the northern and central regions.²⁵⁴ Snowmelt, soil erosion, land degradation, deforestation, changes in land use, over-grazing of native pasture and climate change aggravate these effects.²⁵⁵

While the risks from earthquakes score as high as current and projected conflict (**Figure 11**), the death toll from drought in the last 30 years has exceeded the combined total of deaths caused by all other risks (**Figure 12**). Climate projections suggest that the largest impact of climate change in Afghanistan in the future will be increased drought risk. Increased flood risk is the secondary concern. Annual droughts are likely to become the norm in many regions, rather than temporary or cyclical events, by 2030.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁷ 2019, Food and Agriculture Organization, *Climate Change scenarios: vulnerability, impact and adaptation in Afghanistan*

²⁴⁸ 2015, National Environmental Protection Agency, United Nations Environment Programme, [Climate Change Governance in Afghanistan, Kabul](#)

²⁴⁹ 2016, National Environmental Protection Agency Afghanistan, UNEP, [Afghanistan: Climate Change Science Perspectives](#)

²⁵⁰ 2019, Food and Agriculture Organization, *Climate Change scenarios: vulnerability, impact and adaptation in Afghanistan*

²⁵¹ 2020, WHO, Government of Belgium, [Emergency Events Database](#)

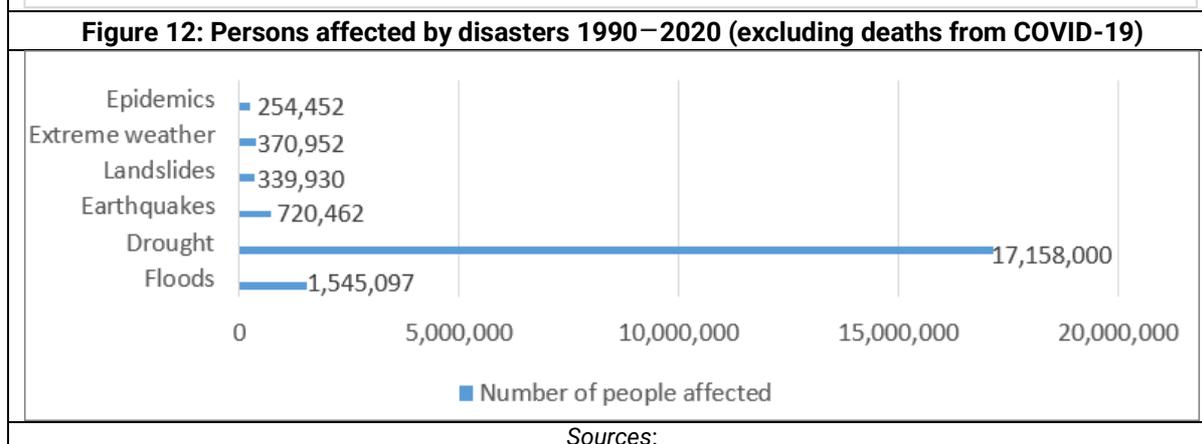
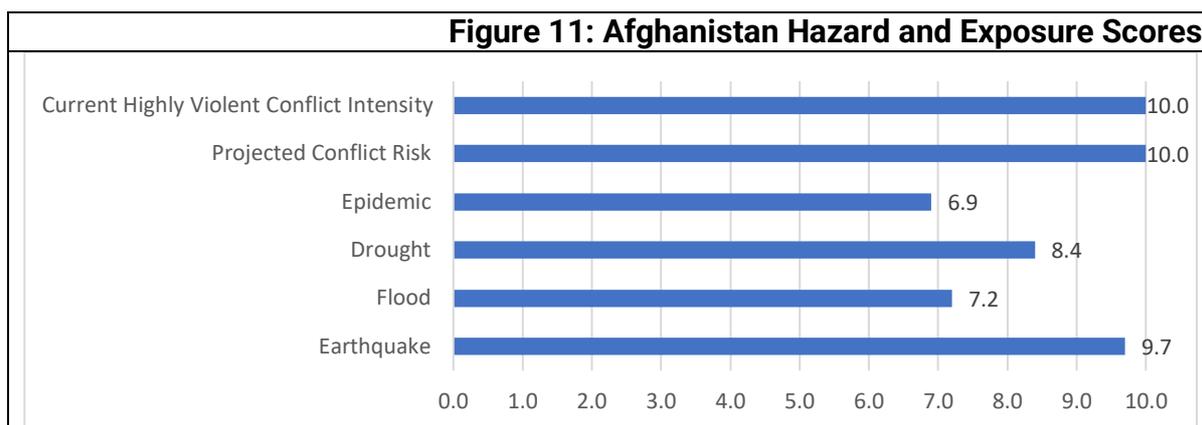
²⁵² 2018, Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority. *Afghanistan Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction*

²⁵³ 2017, World Bank, [Disaster Risk Profile: Afghanistan](#)

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ 2019, Food and Agriculture Organization, *Climate Change scenarios: vulnerability, impact and adaptation in Afghanistan*

²⁵⁶ Ibid.



Threats can be grouped into two categories. The first includes threats that arise from resource scarcity, such as water, energy and food. Effects of these threats are accentuated by human pressure for survival and population increase. For example, using wood, charcoal and dung for heating and cooking by 75 per cent of the population has placed Afghanistan among the ten worst-affected countries by indoor pollution. Incidences of premature death and pollution-related disease have increased as a result.²⁵⁷ The dwindling land area covered by forests (less than 2 per cent)²⁵⁸ may end up without forests within the next 30 years at the current rate of deforestation.²⁵⁹

Whilst the first category can be solved through policy, the second consists of threats that arise from natural disasters, such as floods and droughts. These call for a **process to be managed**. Overall, Afghanistan faces high risks of climate exposure to stresses, shocks and hazards, and low coping capacity. It has an overall global ranking of 2 and a ranking of 1 in hazards and exposure.²⁶⁰ At present, Afghanistan lacks risk information and advanced warning systems. The National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) has identified and prioritized those sectors of the country most

²⁵⁷ WHO, 2012

²⁵⁸ 2016, Food and Agriculture Organization, [Land Cover Atlas, Afghanistan](#)

²⁵⁹ 2012 UNEP; 2016 Food and Agriculture Organization

²⁶⁰ 2021, European Commission, [Index for Risk Management](#)

vulnerable to climate hazards.²⁶¹ However, this effort may be diluted by the lack of funds and high-quality information, especially at district and provincial levels. The Drought Risk Management Strategy 2019 (DRMS) estimated a resource requirement of \$5 billion from 2019 to 2030 for multi-sectoral drought risk reduction.²⁶²

Intersecting forms of exclusion and most vulnerable groups

Those who risk being left behind face multiple, intersecting forms of exclusion. They face various deprivations, disadvantages and discrimination arising from circumstances over which the individual has little or no direct control, such as their household's wealth or their place of residence.

An analysis by ESCAP²⁶³ explores inequality in six areas affecting a person's life prospects: education; women's access to sexual or reproductive health, violence against women, access to clean water and basic sanitation; access to clean energy, and financial inclusion. These opportunities and barriers are covered by specific commitments outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The characteristics of marginalized groups are identified by the following dimensions: wealth, residence, educational attainment, gender, marital status, number of children under five years of age, and age group. The analysis identified the characteristics of the most

disadvantaged groups as follows. Data has been drawn from the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey:

Financial inclusion

On average, 12 per cent of households own a bank account. The furthest-behind group are the households in which the highest completed level of education is lower (primary or none) and belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the wealth distribution, among which only 2 per cent own a bank account (compared to 41 per cent in the best-off group).

Access to basic sanitation

On average, 25 per cent of households have access to basic sanitation. The furthest-behind group are households in rural areas belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the wealth distribution and in which the highest completed level of education is lower (primary or none), among which 9 per cent have basic sanitation (compared to 52 per cent in the best-off group).

Access drinking water

On average, 65 per cent of households have access to drinking water. The furthest-behind group are households belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the wealth distribution. The highest completed level of education for this group is primary or none. Only 42 per cent have access to drinking water (compare to 88 per cent in the best-off group).

Access to clean fuels

The average access to clean fuels is 33 per cent. The furthest-behind group are

²⁶¹ 2012, National Environmental Protection Agency Afghanistan, [Afghanistan's first national report intended for United Nation's framework of climate change convention 2012](#)

²⁶² 2020, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, [Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030](#)

²⁶³ Unpublished, UNESCAP, *Inequality Of Opportunity: Who Are Those Left Behind? Afghanistan*

households in rural areas belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the wealth distribution, among which 4 per cent have access to clean fuels (compare to 84 per cent in the best-off group).

Access to electricity

The average number of people with access to electricity is 71 per cent. The furthest-behind group are households in rural area with either a primary education level or no education. Among this group, only 54 per cent have access to electricity (compared to 92 per cent in the best-off group).

Women's needs satisfied by modern contraception

On average, 42 per cent of women have their family-planning needs met using modern methods. The furthest-behind group are poorer women living in rural areas with two or more children under five years of age. Among them, 31 per cent meet their family planning needs with modern methods (compare to 67 per cent in the best-off group).

Sexual or physical violence against women

Fifty-one per cent of women have suffered sexual or physical violence against women over the past 12 months. Women most likely to experience violence are generally over 25 years old, living in rural areas with one or more children under five years of age. They are also more likely to belong to the top 60 of the wealth distribution. Among these, 58 per cent have experienced sexual or physical violence.

Access to skilled birth attendance

The average access to a skilled birth attendant during childbirth is 56 per cent. The characteristics of the furthest-behind group are poorer women over 25 years old with less than

two children under five. Among these, 33 per cent had access to a skilled birth attendant during childbirth (compare to 85 per cent in the best-off group).

Completion of secondary and higher education

The average secondary education completion rate is 17 per cent. The furthest behind group are poorer women living in rural areas, among which 3 per cent has completed secondary education (compared to 39 per cent in the best-off group).

The average higher education completion rate is 6 per cent. The furthest behind group are poorer women living in rural areas, among which none has completed higher education (compared to 12 per cent in the best-off group).

B. THE NATIONAL VISION

ANPDF II (2021–25) and the 2030 SDGs

The achievement of Government objectives and effective use of international support to Afghanistan depends on three key goals. It requires the reduction of political uncertainty (“peacebuilding”), the establishment of effective governance (“state-building”), and the promotion of equitable and sustainable private-sector development (“market-building”). To this end, the Government has formulated a medium-term framework for 2021–25 with an eye to the longer-term objective – the SDGs.

The Government's vision for the next four years is laid out in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2021–25 (ANPDF II), the successor to the previous framework that covered the period for 2017–21

(ANPDF I). Progress under the ANPDF I was considerable. It introduced policy reforms and enabled the coordination of the efforts between the Government, the international community and civil society. The ANPDF I envisaged the implementation of the policies to be undertaken through 10 National Priority Programs (NPPs). Though not designed in alignment with the SDGs, the NPPs served as the primary planning instruments.

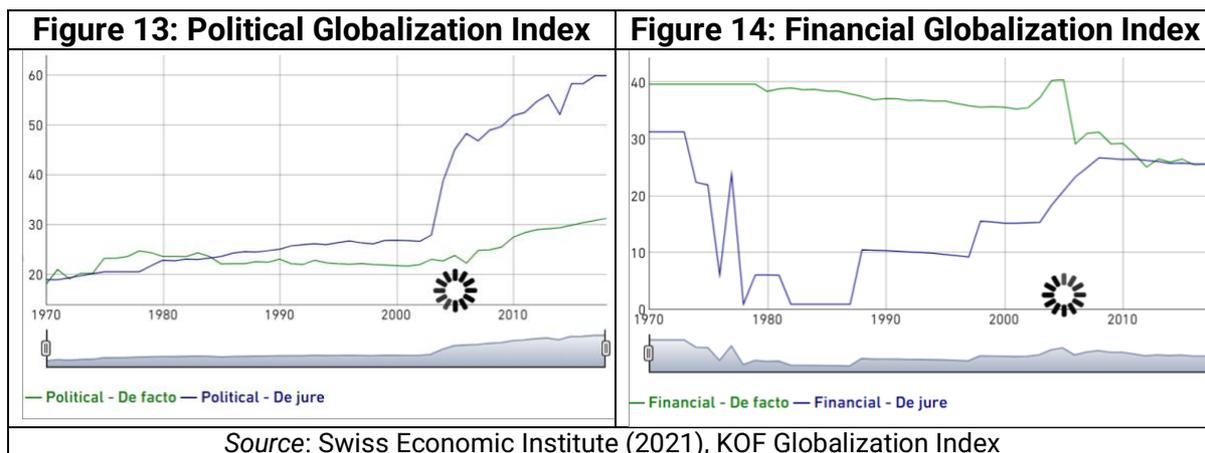
Yet, the conflict has limited the government control and delayed or compromised reforms. According to an evaluation of the effects of international assistance on Afghanistan, interventions considering local context have produced better results at the sectoral level.²⁶⁴ These interventions were in health and education – including for girls – delivering services and building small-scale infrastructure in rural areas despite capacity constraints. The gap between intended objectives and results was significant where broader and more ambitious reform goals were set. Sectors that showed such gaps include governance, the rule of law, democracy promotion, election support, anti-corruption programs, public sector and regulatory policy reforms and capacity building.

Overall, the significant institutional and legal changes that have taken place

since 2001 have not entirely produced the expected results. These challenges have served to reduce trust in Government; citizens have not seen significant progress. Figure 13 shows that despite the stagnation of political progress during the Taliban rule, there was considerable progress on reforms (de jure), accompanied by relatively small improvements on the ground (de facto). Figure 14 shows that, despite substantial financial reforms, Afghanistan's actual position has deteriorated.

The objectives of the current ANPDF II, if pursued as envisaged, should bridge the gap between the policy initiatives and their effects, thus improving the conditions of citizens while enabling Afghanistan to join the globalization race. The ANPDF II puts heavy emphasis on economic growth, with an overarching goal of reducing poverty and improving welfare. Key objectives include ensuring peace and stability, transparent national budget processes, fighting corruption, improvements in governance, organizational reforms, private sector development, reducing poverty, improving livelihoods and encouraging voluntary repatriation and reintegration of displaced persons. These goals are aligned with Afghanistan's commitments to international norms and standards, including the SDGs.

²⁶⁴ 2020, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany Division for Afghanistan and Pakistan, [Zürcher, C. Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008 – 2018](#)



Effectively, the ANPDF II is the national agenda for development. Its implementation can focus on the SDGs' five pillars of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships, serving the people's needs and leaving no one behind. Clear accountability and a transparent framework are the vehicles for such reforms. Cognizant of the gap between intentions and results of the past interventions, the ANPDF II emphasizes the importance of effective implementation to deliver visible results and increase citizen's trust in public institutions. It recognizes the need to:

- 1) strengthen the legal and institutional framework and capacities to effectively prevent and combat corruption and impunity within the security and justice sectors in line with international standards
- 2) engage the civil society, media and communities for the promotion of a culture of transparency and integrity
- 3) support the reform process and enhance the quality and transparency of public institutions and public service delivery

Accordingly, the objectives and policies included in the ANPDF II have been grouped into three pillars: peacebuilding, state-building and market-building. **Peacebuilding** aims to achieve the imperative of peace, social justice and human rights and maintain and strengthen national security.

State-building addresses governance, the rule of law and corruption. It establishes metrics for condition-based aid vis-à-vis the nation's fiscal constraints and optimizes programmes and partnerships through prioritization and selectivity (A-SDG 17). The ultimate goals of state-building are to generate wealth and public revenues to pay for services, reduce reduction and increase self-reliance.

Market-building focuses on the acceleration of private sector development, promotion of regional connectivity, extraction of Afghanistan's natural endowments, expansion of public/private and international partnerships from aid to trade, and inclusive growth (A-SDGs 1 and 8) through, among others advancing gender equality. Pursuing objectives over the medium-term (2021–25), the ANPDF II includes a response to the ongoing pandemic and

plans for achieving the A-SDGs by 2030.

The Fiscal Strategy of ANPDF II seeks to reduce aid dependency and ensure that the national budget can fund national policies. It aims to achieve budget consolidation by establishing fiscal frameworks that align public revenues and spending with national priorities.

The NPPs

The ANPDF II will be implemented through a new set of NPPs that are expanded and adapted in line with the SDGs (**Table 8**). The NPPs are being defined as they were at their concept stage when presented at the Geneva donor pledging conference in November 2020. The direction given at the Conference was that they should be developed into full-fledged programme proposals that will include concrete, implementable and practical plans with budgets and a well-defined road map. Accordingly, all ministries have started developing proposals that state programme objectives, the components and sub-components, as well as activities, outputs and outcome indicators.

Among the proposed NPPs, several stand out. The long-running *National Solidarity Program* launched in 2002 has been followed by the *Citizen's Charter NPP* on community-based development, one of the largest and most prominent of the NPPs. The Charter defines a menu of services for each community, including health, education, and a choice of

infrastructure investments (such as road access, electricity, or small-scale irrigation for rural communities). Services will be delivered through community development councils (CDCs) and non-government partners. Provincial development committees (PDCs) will coordinate, plan (including budgeting) and supervise work led by the provincial governor. An earlier *Subnational Governance Policy* (2018) redefines the Government's relationship with local institutions and ministries, the roles responsibilities of subnational entities, and policymaking. It makes planning and budgeting more coherent and responsive to local needs.²⁶⁵

As has been the case with the previous development framework, drought will again be addressed in the ANPDF II and the new NPPs. The *Comprehensive Agricultural Development NPP* will assess sustainable ways to address adverse effects of climate change on agriculture and livelihoods, building upon multiple initiatives by the government and development partners in policy, institutional and drought response, recovery and mitigation.²⁶⁶ Initiatives include development policies and strategic frameworks, sector-specific instruments and specific drought management instruments.

The NPPs will follow the *National Infrastructure Plan 2017–2021*, the *Infrastructure Development Program 2021–2025*, and the *Afghanistan Transport Sector Master Plan Update 2017–2036*. There is no separate NPP on the environmental though, being cross-cutting, it is covered under others. The five most relevant NPPs are

²⁶⁵ 2018, Governance Independent Directorate of Local Governance, [A roadmap for Subnational Reform, Citizen-Centered](#)

²⁶⁶ 2020, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, [Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030](#)

Extractive Industries, Urban Development (water issues and environmental impacts), the Citizen's Charter (Agriculture - Section 'd'), Effective Governance (land management and administration) and National Infrastructure. The Citizen's

Charter also covers two related areas: natural resources management of forests, rangeland and protected areas, mitigation measures for disaster-risk prevention, as well as post-disaster reconstruction.

Table 8: The Six Clusters of the 22 NPPs	
1. Security: Peace and Reintegration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)
2. Governance: Economic and Financial Reform, Transparency and Accountability, Efficient and Effective Government, Local Governance, Justice for ALL, Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public Financial Management Roadmap ● Human Rights and Civic Responsibilities ● National Priority Programme for Local Governance
3. Infrastructure Development: National Regional Resource Corridor, Extractive Industries, National Energy Program, Urban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National Extractive Industry Excellence Programme ● National and Regional Resource Corridors Program ● Urban Management Support Programme ● National Energy Supply Program
4. Private Sector Development: Trade Facilitation and SME, E-Afghanistan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● E-Afghanistan National Priority Program Proposal ● Integrated Trade and SME Support Facility
5. Human Resource: Development: (Skills Development and Labor, Education for All, Higher Education, Women Affairs, Capacity Building for Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity Development to Accelerate NAPWA Implementation ● Education for All ● Expanding Opportunities for Higher Education ● Sustainable Decent Work Through Skills Development and Employment Policies for Job-Rich Growth ● Health for all Afghans
6. Agriculture and Rural Development: Water and Natural Resource Management, Comprehensive Agriculture, Rural Access, Strengthening Local Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National Rural Access Program ● Strengthening Local Institutions ● National Water and Natural Resources Development ● National Comprehensive Agriculture Production and Market Development Program
Source: Ministry of Finance. ²⁶⁷	

State priorities for the energy sector focus on domestic energy generation. However, there is a lack of clear policy, regulatory and incentive frameworks for private investment. Though the NPPs emphasize Public-Private

Partnerships (PPP) for energy infrastructure, energy law prohibits the private generation and sale of electricity. Domestic financing is another barrier as banks are reluctant to lend for long-term projects. Typically,

²⁶⁷ 2016, Ministry of Finance, Afghanistan, [Background - Prioritizes, Practical and Focused Approaches for Afghanistan National Development Strategy](#)

such investments take five years or more before generating returns. Microfinancing for smaller projects, such as small-scale, community or household level investment in green energy, is limited, too. Similarly, the expected investments from the private sector for large scale generation projects may not be forthcoming given the high political and security risks. Private funding for energy infrastructure is almost non-existent. International donor grants mainly fund energy infrastructure development. Moreover, though Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and digital transformation are central to the objectives of the ANPDF II, neither is prominently included in the NPPs.

In the area of social protection, the Citizen's Charter NPP, through its *Social Inclusion Grant (SIG)*, targets the most vulnerable households in the community (the "very poor" category) through a matching grant of up to \$2,000 per community. Moreover, the Citizen's Charter aims to deliver a basic package of services, including access to clean drinking water, quality education in government schools and a basic package of health services. In this respect, it complements the Human Capital NPP that is being reprioritized to strengthen the quality of and access to education and health. It is anticipated that victims of the conflict may benefit from reparations for the physical and economic harm to which they have been subjected. Specific, dedicated resources are needed to adequately implement its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

without discrimination, especially for infrastructure, system and institutional changes and reform.

Under the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme (WEE-NPP), the ongoing 2018 Women's Economic Empowerment Rural Development Project (WEE-RDP) targets rural, peri-urban, urban areas, and nomadic populations IDPs and returnees. This livelihood support programme delivers access to²⁶⁸ training in literacy, business management and labour skills; creative economy markets; agricultural inputs, extension services and markets; and finance.²⁶⁹ It is estimated that 6,250 CDCs are currently covered in all the 76 districts, covering around 70 per cent of all CDCs.²⁷⁰ By 2019 it had reached 100,000 beneficiaries, with 450,000 beneficiaries planned until 2023.

Despite these initiatives, prospects for expanding and financing social protections are limited, given the tight fiscal situation. Existing programmes are primarily supported by external assistance, both on budget and off-budget. No large-scale national safety nets or tax-based transfer programmes are envisaged through social protection as a human right is enshrined in Article 6 of the Constitution. Several strategies and plans refer to "safeguards" or "safety nets" for the most vulnerable groups, including women, children, internally displaced persons, returnees, persons with disabilities, and the Kuchi population, as part of broader poverty reduction measures. However, these "safeguards" are neither clearly defined

²⁶⁸ 2018, World Bank, [Combined Project Information Documents / Integrated Safeguards Datasheet \(PID/ISDS\)](#)

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ 2018, World Bank, [Project appraisal document on proposed grants of \\$100 million for the women's economic empowerment rural development project](#)

nor do they have funds allocated to them. The only clear reference made to social protection in the ANPDF II is the link between social protection and agriculture. Targets such as child labour, migration, internally displaced people, unpaid work, violence against women and girls, ending exploitation and torture of children, and labour rights protection are not explicitly included in the NPPs.

Looking forward

The ANPDF II aims to transform Afghanistan into a middle-income country. If economic growth continues to grow as it has done throughout the 2010s, per capita incomes will at best remained stagnant or even decline given the relatively fast population growth. A future annual rate of GDP growth of 5 per cent will, on average, increase annual per capita incomes by 3 per cent. At that rate, per capita incomes will reach \$1,036 – the threshold for lower-middle incomes – not before 2045. That estimate assumes that the security situation does not deteriorate and no other shocks emerge in the meantime.

Other expectations of the ANPDF II include the electricity grid covering all 34 provinces by 2021 (from 25 in 2020) and energy self-sufficiency achieved by 2035. The Green Energy objective, which aims to “ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”, is rightly ambitious. However, under current circumstances, providing “affordable and clean energy to all” is unlikely to be achieved by 2030.²⁷¹

The Citizens’ Charter can improve access to essential services and social protection for Afghan communities. While well-received, it has been difficult to scale up its operations, which is functional in about half of the target districts. This partial coverage leaves out many conflict-affected communities.

Being the enabling planning instruments for the ANPDF II, the NPPs need to align with the relevant strategic plans at the ministry level. Alignment, however, has been a challenging task in the past; their content is crucially dependent on political decisions.



²⁷¹ 2017, National Environmental Protection Agency, [Afghanistan Second National Communication under the UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE \(UNFCCC\)](#)

C. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 SDG AGENDA

Afghanistan has achieved only 38 per cent of the progress required towards all the SDGs. This progress places it in the 139th position out of 162 countries for which estimates are available. It is only likely to meet 15 (9 per cent) of the 169 global SDG targets by 2030. In the future, it will be essential to exploit the synergies between the Government's efforts, its domestic stakeholders and the international community. SDG Integration can help the Government extend the ANPDF II medium-term framework into 2030, make the best possible use of the available funding, and raise economic prosperity, increase social inclusion and ensure ecological sustainability. The attainment of A-SDGs is only possible where targets align with national priorities and if the A-SDGs are eventually funded through predictable domestic revenues as part of a regular budgeting process. Reducing the level of violence and reaching a peace agreement is a critical precondition.

Afghanistan's approach to the SDGs: A-SDGs

Soon after the adoption of the SDGs by the international community, the Government assessed which goals are more appropriate for the country and adapted them as *Afghanistan SDGs (A-SDGs)*. It developed a *National Framework for the Implementation of the A-SDGs* and identified 12 goals organized in three pillars:

- Security: Achieve nationwide stabilization, strengthen law enforcement, and improve personal security for every Afghan citizen
- Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights: Strengthen democratic processes and institutions, human rights, the rule of law, delivery of public services and government accountability
- Economic and Social Development: Reduce poverty, ensure sustainable development through a private-sector-led market economy, improve human development indicators, and make significant progress towards the SDGs.

A Voluntary National Review at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2017 selected 134 national targets associated with 189 indicators. In January 2019, the Ministry of Economy prioritized the most relevant targets. These were subsequently validated by the UN Country Team and the World Bank Country Office in Kabul.

Having reworked the global SDGs and brought them in line with the reality on the ground in the form of A-SDGs, Afghanistan has selected three key SDGs and their related targets and Indicators for special attention. These are SDG One on Ending Poverty; SDG Five on Gender Equality, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Several specific targets have been included in the Afghanistan Partnership Framework (APF) of November 2020.²⁷²

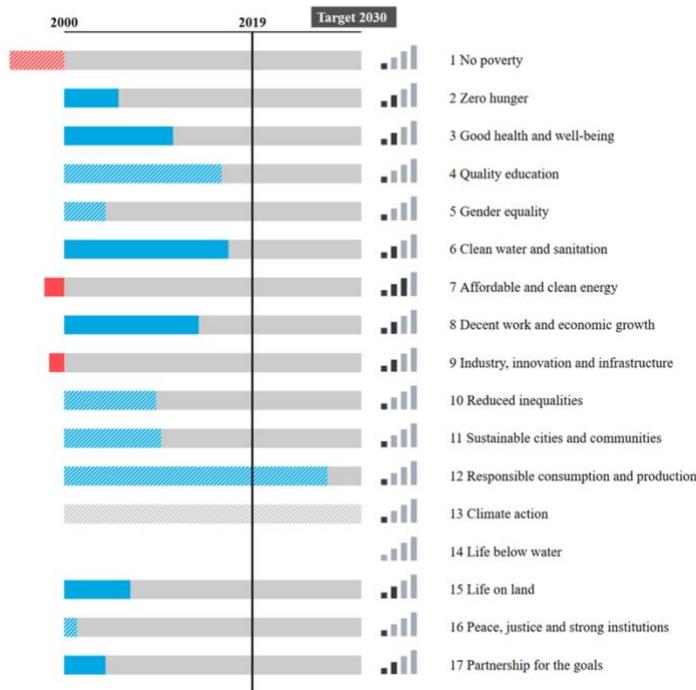
Figure 15 summarizes the progress towards achieving the A-SDGs, whilst **figure 16** shows progress on individual targets, indicating where information is lacking.²⁷³ Afghanistan does not have data for 91 of the 169 SDG targets (54 per cent). In addition, it has insufficient information for measuring progress in 15 per cent of the indicators attached to those targets. It lacks data for a further 43 per cent of the global SDG indicators.²⁷⁴

²⁷² 2020, 2020 Afghanistan Conference, [Afghanistan Partnership Framework, Actions 1.3 and 1.4, pages 6 and 7](#)

²⁷³ Figures 15 and 16 are based on the analysis conducted by the Statistical Data Management Unit (SDMU), Statistics Division, ESCAP.

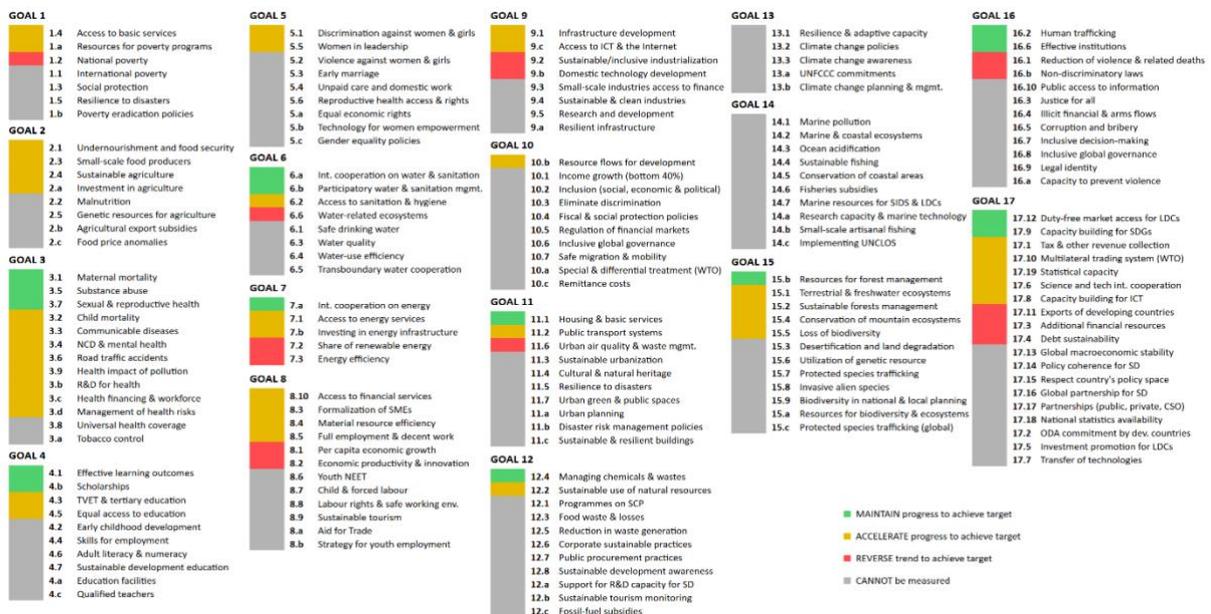
²⁷⁴ UNESCAP, [SDG Data Availability](#)

Figure 15: Progress toward the Goals



Source: UNESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

Figure 16: Progress towards Individual Targets



Source:

Selected A-DGs

GOAL 1: No Poverty

With a headcount poverty rate of around 50 per cent, achieving the SDG poverty goal (SDG 1.2.1) is a huge task. The poverty gap – the percentage difference between the average income of the poor and what is needed to reach the poverty level of \$30 per person per month – is 13.5 per cent (\$4 per person per month). At the macro level, the poverty gap amounts to nearly \$900 million annually, almost 5 per cent of GDP. Multidimensional poverty (SDG 1.2.2) is also around 50 per cent. Moreover, many Afghans live just above the national poverty line – 93 per cent live on less than \$2 per person per day.²⁷⁵ Thus, more than one-third of the population is both monetarily and multidimensionally poor.²⁷⁶

The A-SDG for poverty is measured through seven targets.²⁷⁷ These include the target for all men and women to have equal rights to economic resources.²⁷⁸ Two related indicators look at the proportion of the population living in households with access to essential services and the proportion of the total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure by sex and type of tenure.²⁷⁹ Currently, poverty goals seem unattainable by 2030. They have, in fact, shown deterioration over time.

GOAL 2: Zero Hunger

Food scarcity goals are monitored with 25 targets and 15 indicators. However, these indicators are much lower than those found in other South Asian countries. Ongoing A-SDG monitoring indicates that progress has been slow in terms of achievements on these 25 targets and 15 indicators. Food insecurity remains at high levels, with over 40 per cent of the population facing emergency or crisis levels of acute food insecurity. Food insecurity increases further during periods of drought. Malnutrition is the number one risk factor driving death and disability in Afghanistan. The share of children under the age of five who are stunted places Afghanistan in the lowest quintile of countries that face food scarcity problems.²⁸⁰

Like poverty goals, SDG-2 is unlikely to be achieved unless there is a significant, coordinated effort to invest more in agriculture and make it sustainable, particularly for small-scale farmers. Several national food strategies currently address key drivers of food insecurity. Similarly, the CAD-NPP for agriculture has been designed to streamline these varied efforts and increase agricultural production.²⁸¹ It is complemented by the Citizens Charter program and other related irrigation and rural development initiatives contributing to SDG 2 and associated targets. However, outcomes will depend on achieving the goals of other

²⁷⁵ 2019, World Bank, [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan \(2018-2021\)](#)

²⁷⁶ Ibid

²⁷⁷ 2015, Government of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goal 1, Indicators and Targets](#)

²⁷⁸ Ibid., Target 1.4.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., Indicators 1.4.1 and 1.4.2.

²⁸⁰ 2019, World Bank, South Asia Human Capital Action

²⁸¹ 2018, Ministry of Economy, Afghanistan, [Aligning National Priority Programs \(NPPs\) with Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals \(ASDGs\)](#)

SDGs, such as those for the environment. Of course, this also assumes that there will be no natural disasters in the meantime.

GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being

The prospects for SDG-3 are more mixed than those for poverty and hunger. If past trends and policy support continue, maternal mortality and sexual and reproductive health targets can be achieved. The situation is less optimistic concerning child mortality, communicable diseases, adverse effects from pollution, health financing and more effective management of health risks. Achieving universal health coverage seems out of reach at present.

GOAL 4: Quality Education

Achieving universal enrolments at the basic education level is within reach if past efforts continued unabated. However, much will depend on whether the enrolments of girls accelerate. At higher levels of education, and in terms of learning outcomes and equal access to education, progress is unlikely to meet the corresponding SDG targets by 2030. Compared to the high rates of adult illiteracy, only 200,000 adults have been reached, mainly in the major cities. Dropout rates are between 40 per cent to 50 per cent.

Continuing donor funding and engagement from national-level stakeholders are required to meet the education SDG 4 and SDG 5 goals. In addition, support for expanding education efforts and programmes that address cultural resistance to girls'

education and the modernising curricula will also be needed.²⁸²

GOAL 5: Gender Equality

Over the last two decades, there has been progress in several indicators associated with gender equality. For example, the gender gap in education has narrowed (SDG goal 4.5) due to substantial increases in female enrolments over time. In health, the maternal mortality ratio has declined (SDG target 3.1). Still, both indicators are significantly below those found in other countries. They will require a much faster rate of progress during the current decade to reach the relevant targets by 2030.

The A-SDGs have also selected additional indicators related to gender equality and empowering all women and girls.²⁸³ These include targets on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls (and more generally, children: Indicators 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.3.1), harmful practices (indicators 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.3.1) including early and forced marriage: (indicators 5.2 and 5.3), women's equal rights to economic resources (target 5A), and women's land tenure security and legal guarantees (including in customary law) of women's equal rights to land ownership or control (indicator 5.A.1 and 5.A.2).

Several policy actions have promoted women's economic empowerment, including the Women's Economic Empowerment Program – part of the Global Agenda (SDG Goals 5, 8 and 16) and one of the National Priority Programs. However, violence against women and girls is widespread despite

²⁸² 2014, University of Minnesota, [Bryson, J. M., Stakeholder Identification and Analyses Techniques](#)

²⁸³ 2015, Government of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goal 5, Indicators and Targets](#)

the 2009 *Elimination of Violence Against Women Law* and the *Penal Code of 2018*.²⁸⁴ While current data is not generally publicly available, violence against women and girls is thought to be significant.²⁸⁵ At the same time, women's access to justice is limited; only half of all violent crimes reported reach a primary court.²⁸⁶

GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

The energy sector has potent interactions with poverty (SDG-1), health (SDG-3), education (SDG-4), climate change (SDG-13) and peace (SDG-16). These are arguably the six most important SDGs for Afghanistan as the country transitions towards peace.

Among the four indicators related to SDG7, there are data for only one: Indicator 7.1.1 on the proportion of the population with access to the electricity network, disaggregated by urban and rural segments. In this respect, practically all (98 per cent) have access to electricity (mainly for lighting), on-grid and off-grid through small solar panels.²⁸⁷ That's an impressive increase since 2001 when less than five per cent of the population had access

to electricity.²⁸⁸ However, 75 per cent of the population still rely on solid fuels for cooking and 96 per cent for heating. As a result, Afghanistan is among the ten countries worst affected by indoor pollution. This position has spillover effects on other SDGs, such as increased premature deaths and pollution-related diseases.²⁸⁹

Afghanistan is likely to fall short on SDG Target 7.b regarding investments in energy infrastructure. Though such investments are considered a priority in the ANPDF II, which envisions energy self-sufficiency in the next 15 years, only \$223 million is allocated to energy sector development from a development budget of \$1.83 billion in 2020-2021.²⁹⁰ In addition, policy documents do not reflect interconnections between SDG 7 and other SDGs.²⁹¹ For example, SDG-7 has very strong links to poverty (SDG-1), health (SDG-3), education (SDG-4), climate change (SDG-13) and peace (SDG-16). The NPPs provide support to SDG7 but do not keep to the goal year 2030. Comparing progress on the ground, providing "affordable and clean energy to all" by the projected date would require massive support from the international donor community.

²⁸⁴ 2010, UNAMA, OHCHR, [Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan](#)

²⁸⁵ See, for instance, 2015 Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health, and The DHS Program, [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey](#), p. 273-280, finding that more than half (53 per cent) of the ever-married women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence at least once since age 15. Further, only 20 per cent of ever-married women in Afghanistan who have ever experienced any form of physical or sexual violence have sought help from any source; 61 per cent have never sought help and never told anyone about the violence.

²⁸⁶ 2020, UNAMA/OHCHR, [In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence against Women and Girls](#)

²⁸⁷ 2015, Asian Development Bank, [North-South Power Transmission Enhancement Project, Sector Assessment](#)

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ 2012, [WHO](#)

²⁹⁰ There is a separate budget allocation to provide access to clean energy to the rural population. [AFG National Budget](#)

²⁹¹ 2018, Environmental Research Letters, [McCullum, D. Connecting the sustainable development goals by their energy inter-linkages](#)

GOALS 9 and 17: Digital Connectivity

Digital connectivity for all is an important goal (SDG 17). Making digital services accessible and affordable (SDG-9) can have cumulative economic and social benefits.²⁹² However, the digital dividends are far from being realized as most of the population (80 per cent) are offline, with substantial differences between urban and rural areas, incomes, and gender. The low rates of internet penetration and digital divides deprives many other SDGs of the potential benefits from digital connectivity. For example, there can be substantial dividends from information and communication technologies (ICT) not only for industry and the private sector but also for health administration and service delivery (SDG 3), education outcomes (SDG-4), agriculture productivity (SDG-2), gender (SDG 5), access to digital services including payment platforms (SDG-1), employment and skills training (SDG 8).

The digital transformation can serve as a significant SDG accelerator by raising the quality of interventions. Moreover, it can help build greater trust in the Government through improved access to critical services, for example, justice, social and e-government services, voter verification, citizen participation, and humanitarian interventions.

GOAL 13: Climate Action

A lack of adequate information hampers monitoring progress for this

SDG. A total of 63 per cent of the environment-related SDG indicators have insufficient or no data. Amongst indicators for which there are data, 16 per cent have had positive progress, 13 per cent have shown practically no improvement, and 8 per cent have regressed.²⁹³ Thus, over 60 per cent of the Planet SDGs are not well measured. Addressing this information failure leads to improvements in environmental management (SDG-12a), access to renewable energy (SDG-7a; A-SDG-7b), and reduced levels of food insecurity through more productive agriculture. These are three key areas that underpin the Government's ANPDF II strategy of self-reliance.

Together with conflict, environmental degradation presents the most systemic threat to Afghanistan. The consequences of ecological change on many other aspects of life can be grave, particularly as they related to A-SDG-1 (Poverty), A-SDG-2 (Zero Hunger), A-SDG-13 (Climate Action) and A-SDG-15 (Life on Land). Given the severity of Afghanistan's financial, technological, and capacity gaps, advancing climate mitigation and adaptation goals is likely to prove challenging.²⁹⁴

The Government has implemented several environmental policies around water quality and conducted social impact assessments. The Government has adopted a five-year plan to reduce air pollution. Presidential decrees to protect the environment are being implemented, and several natural areas and species are now protected.

²⁹² ICTs include the internet, mobile phones, and other tools designed to collect, store, analyse and share information digitally, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cryptocurrency, virtual reality, and the internet of things.

²⁹³ 2017, UNEP, [Sustainable Development Goals Scorecard](#)

²⁹⁴ 2017, National Environmental Protection Agency, [Afghanistan Second National Communication under the UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE \(UNFCCC\)](#)

Mapping the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) that Afghanistan has ratified, it is clear that SDG planning and priorities could contribute to the progress of A-SDGs in conjunction with the ANPDF II and its accompanying NPPs. However, effective integration of environmental concerns would require a national environmental policy and the implementation of the Environment Act of 2008.

GOAL 15: Life on Land

Another issue is the dwindling total land area covered by forests.²⁹⁵ In 2012 UNEP noted that, at the current rate of deforestation, all Afghan forests would disappear within 30 years. Deforestation makes progress towards achieving A-SDG indicator goals 15.1.1 (forest area as a proportion of total land area) and 15.1.2 (progress towards sustainable forest management) enormously difficult.

GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

SDG 16 calls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Afghanistan has selected ten relevant targets and related indicators.²⁹⁶ The most salient target the promotion of the rule of law and access to justice (Target 16.3), strengthening of national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime (Target 16 A), and the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (Target 6 B). The four related indicators are as follows:

- Reporting violence to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms (Indicator 16.3.1)
- Persons deprived of their liberty (Indicator 16.3.2)
- Existence of an independent national human rights institution Indicator (16.A.1)
- Reporting discrimination as prohibited under international human rights law (Indicator 16.B.1).

Achieving social cohesion, social protection, and inclusion is a main priority. It would require substantial improvements in the availability and use of data around SDGs, greatly improved public policy and implementation capacities, and greatly expanded and improved community access to social protection and services. Afghanistan would also need a justice system that is trusted and fully accountable and conflict mitigation support.

Civil society and other stakeholders and government institutions must work much more closely in partnership at all levels to achieve the SDGs and improve trust as part of the social compact.

Social Protection: A cross-cutting Issue

Progress toward increasing social protection is conditional on the advancement of practically all SDGs. The SDGs that most strongly support social protections include Poverty (SDG-1), Health (SDG-3), Education (SDG-4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Employment (SDG-8), Inequality (SDG-10) and Climate Action (SDG 13). Other

²⁹⁵ 2016, Food and Agriculture Organization

²⁹⁶ 2015, Government of Afghanistan, [Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goal 16, Indicators and Targets](#)

goals of relevance to social protection are SDG-2 on hunger, SDG-6 on water and sanitation, SDG-7 on energy, SDG-16 on peace/ justice/ strong institutions) and SDG-17 on partnerships.

Accordingly, social protection in the A-SDGs is monitored through 22 targets and 33 indicators in areas such as eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality and empowering women, reducing inequalities, implementing measures to combat climate change, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. These targets and indicators fall under the general provisions of A-SDG Target 1.3 that prescribes, “by 2030, implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”. A-SDG Indicator 8.b.1 specifies the relevant metric, “total government spending in social protection and employment programs as a proportion of the national budgets and GDP”.

Afghanistan currently performs weakly on most of the SDGs upon which it depends. Moreover, the cross-sectoral nature of social protection calls for a systemic approach to the development strategies and policies for social protection and all other sectors. Progress can only be achieved if all other areas that support social protection advance simultaneously and reinforce each other. This kind of collaboration would require that all other targets are pursued with equal effectiveness, are aligned with national priorities and adequately funded. However, challenges such as child labour, migration, internally displaced people, unpaid work, violence against women and girls, exploitation and torture of children, and protection of

labour rights are not covered by the existing NPPs.

Looking Forward

Developing an adequate statistical basis, and not only for monitoring progress toward the A-SDGs, is imperative for planning the future of Afghanistan. It will be helpful to increase the degree of overlap between the SDG targets and indicators with those included in the ANPDF II and the related NPPs and create a single integrated monitoring and evaluation framework.

A more significant challenge for Afghanistan is to break policy silos and adopt an integrated approach across the whole policy spectrum of economic, social and environmental policies to ensure coherence and exploit complementarities (**TEXTBOX 2**). Identifying “accelerators” that can have synergistic effects across the SDGs will not alone be enough but would require building an adequate implementation capacity that is largely lacking at present.

The ongoing conflict adds to the challenges because of the Government’s limited outreach across the country and because nonstate actors have interests or cultural values not fully aligned with national priorities. In addition, Afghanistan and its international partners will increasingly need to contend with a peace process that may be combined with variable levels of violence and instability during the war-to-peace transitions. Under these circumstances, the next few years are likely to provide an unpredictable and shifting combination of challenges and opportunities for the UN and other international partners,

requiring repeated shifts within an SDG-based HDP nexus framework.

TEXTBOX2: Accelerating Progress toward the SDGs

To accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda, a cross-agency approach to programming will be needed, one that is designed to deliver SDG “results” rather than fragmented project outcomes. With the possible exception of SDG-7 on access to affordable, reliable, sustainable energy which is one of the biggest development challenges in Afghanistan, focusing individually on specific SDGs as “accelerators” is unlikely to create synergies with other SDGs. For example, improvements in governance are bound to have cascading effects across the economy and society. Similarly, progress toward gender equality can have an impact on 23 per cent (53/232) of the global SDG indicators that have a gender component. Similarly, the introduction and expansion of social protection can serve both development and humanitarian objectives thereby accelerating many other SDGs.

Other factors that can accelerate the achievement of the Agenda 2030 in Afghanistan include:

- Introducing a whole-of-UN, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to learning as SDG integration depends on learning at different levels,
- Helping the Government to create digital-era public institutions to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency,
- Focusing on innovation and learning to finding new ways of dealing with the trade-offs that have to be made between competing SDG objectives,
- Identifying bottlenecks (e.g. distance from the nearest road, lack of funding, administrative capacity, skills, infrastructure, etc.) in reaching the most vulnerable (those left furthest behind),
- Developing more integrated policies based on an improved understanding of how the SDGs influence each other (the synergies and trade-offs across sectors reflecting the integrated nature of the Agenda 2030).
- Consolidating SDG financing and building the partnerships needed to accelerate progress

This is a difficult agenda that requires a very strong political will and achieving peace. On the UN side, its agencies would also need to make the shift from single-point solutions and incremental improvements to transformational change in Afghanistan by working together and identifying the optimal leverage points and the most effective ways to assist Afghanistan. So, both the Government and the UN will therefore need to continually reassess the effectiveness of projects to understand how best to achieve system level changes and accelerate progress. This means to bypass the disruptions caused by staggered grant cycles and constantly adjust and renegotiate the original intent of interventions as the circumstances around them may change in unpredictable ways. The question to constantly be asking is “how does the UN portfolio, government budgets and projects align with the organization’s stated intentions, fiscal situation and implementation capacity and outreach”?

The UN Development System has in general shown an ability to make a shift towards an integrated portfolio design approach across its many agencies and plans to also do so in Afghanistan by identifying where the country needs to intervene and understanding what effects interventions create and, based on this, trying over time to create system-level effects.

D. COMMITMENTS UNDER INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND STANDARDS

Afghanistan is a party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties, representing minimum obligations it must uphold, promote and protect.²⁹⁷ These obligations will remain even if a new government hold different views. There is no provision for withdrawal in many international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Together with additions to domestic laws and policies, these treaties have increased access to justice and progressed human rights. A Bill of Rights now mandates fundamental rights and freedoms in the 2004 constitution and the mainstreaming of Afghanistan's international human rights obligations into domestic laws and policies. The 2018 Penal Code consolidated penal provisions in all statutes making them more accessible and easier to refer to and apply.²⁹⁸ It also improved definitions, incorporated international best practices and domesticated Afghanistan's international treaty obligations (see **ANNEX 1**). Other significant and recent changes include adopting the Criminal Procedure Code and revising laws on the Structure and Authority of the Attorney General's Office (AGO Law),

the Office of Prisons Affairs Management Law, and the Law on the Structure and Authority of the Courts.

Progress notwithstanding much remains to be done regarding the effective implementation of domestic laws and policies to operationalize obligations arising from these treaties. Afghanistan must build official and cultural support for fundamental rights, particularly gender and labour rights, and accountability for rights violations and abuses.²⁹⁹ Unregulated, informal justice is far more accessible and trusted outside the main cities than the formal justice system. In most cases, it bypasses compliance with international due process standards. Even in Government-controlled areas, there are deficits in human resource capacities in the civil service, including high turnover of experienced personnel, gender discrimination, corruption and a general lack of public inclusion. Confidence in the ability of the State to govern effectively and equitably remains limited, especially in rural and remote areas and among vulnerable communities.

²⁹⁷ 2021, OHCHR, [The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies](#)

²⁹⁸ With the exception of the provisions of the EVAW Decree.

²⁹⁹ Including the establishment of dispute resolution capacity in the government and the judiciary.

E. FINANCING

Financing

A massive and sudden injection of international aid followed the end of Taliban rule in 2001. In the early 2010s, the effects of the withdrawal of international troops on the rate of economic growth started to show. In the meantime, the reduced absorptive capacity of the economy and weak oversight led to inefficient use of resources. Much was appropriated locally or leaked to haven deposits abroad.

The Government has now developed a Fiscal Strategy, enhanced its oversight of how expenditures are allocated and spent, and established a Medium-Term Fiscal Framework. The Fiscal Strategy aims to achieve budget consolidation by developing appropriate budgetary procedures for policies, programmes and projects. The Government will revise budgets annually as the situation changes and national priorities shift. Fiscal and public finance management is now better guided, and the budget is now better aligned with national priorities and citizens' needs. Afghanistan has made significant progress in improving its Anti Money Laundering/Countering Financing Terrorism effort (AML/CFT) and is no longer subject to international monitoring.

The effects of these efforts would take time to be realized. The gains may not reach the level required to achieve the objectives of the ANPDF II and adequately fund the NPPs. One example is the ubiquitous, traditional

'hawala' money transfer system that allows Afghans to launder narcotics revenue easily. The Afghan Government is unable to provide oversight to this mechanism which dominates the country's economy. "Afghan authorities estimate that unlicensed businesses account for approximately 20–30 per cent of financial flows and there are an unknown but considerable number of illegal operations".³⁰⁰

Over the period 2021–25 envisaged in ANPDG II and NPPs, more funds will be required to support their objectives and progress towards the SDGs. However, Afghanistan's financing needs are projected to stay beyond its means. In 2020, total revenues and grants amounted to 54 per cent of GDP. Domestic revenues amounted to only 11 per cent of GDP. Projections by the World Bank expect domestic revenues to rise to 14 per cent of GDP by 2024. Donor funding is expected to decline from 43 per cent of GDP in 2020 to 34 per cent in 2024.

Financing needs until 2030 are expected to increase considerably. Part of this will be due to the expanding population; many are already in need of substantial humanitarian assistance, which calls for an additional \$1.3 billion in 2021 alone. Health services must expand. Yet, even the Basic (BPHS) and Essential (EPHS) Package of Health Services is almost entirely financed by donors, while three-quarters of related expenses are paid out-of-pocket. Donors also support education, but public expenditures have stagnated at around 3 per cent of GDP in the second half of the 2010s with little prospect of a future increase.

³⁰⁰ 2019, International Monetary Fund, [Staff Report for the 2019 Article IV Consultation and the Sixth Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Islamic Republic of Afghanistan](#)

Expanding humanitarian assistance and social services would only require relative moderate fiscal outlays compared to other planned investments during the coming decade. Priority adaptation actions for confronting the effects of drought and climate change are estimated at nearly \$11 billion between 2020 and 2030. The Drought Risk Management Strategy (DRMS) developed in 2019 estimates a resource requirement of \$5 billion over 2019–2030.³⁰¹ The Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) programme aims to raise more than \$3 billion in 2021 alone to invest in sectors such as energy, agriculture, urban development, health technologies, mining, and aviation. Though most funding is expected to come from private investments, such initiatives still require public contributions in the order of 15 to 20 per cent. For the current year, investments in the energy sector will reach nearly \$250 million. In total, the financing requirement for the SDGs until 2030 is estimated at \$3 billion.

Any objectives to decrease dependency on international aid and replace it with domestic revenues must be considered alongside current spending forecasts. Afghanistan will need approximately 30% more in grants from the international community over the next five years to maintain the current level of government expenditure.³⁰² This estimate assumes that the effects from COVID-19 will not escalate, and no

more future funds will be required to address the impact of the pandemic.

Donor funds are increasingly coming in with additional conditionalities attached to them. Some donors indicate that total commitments will be disbursed annually on the condition that progress has been made. Others have stated that before committing to future years, they will wait for the conclusion of intra-Afghan peace negotiations. Justice-sector financing will be predicated upon Afghanistan adopting an increasingly rights-based approach to sector reform and service delivery.³⁰³ In environmental areas, public and private investments are expected to be compatible with the SDGs and the Paris Accord on Climate Change.³⁰⁴

Afghanistan's future ability to raise revenues domestically would first and foremost depend on achieving peace, the immediate effect of which would be to release funds currently spent on security. Though a successful outcome of peace negotiations may result in falling external revenues, an environment conducive to economic growth can compensate for losses, expanding the tax base and increasing domestic revenues.

In addition to striving for peace and pursuing policies for inclusive economic growth, several options can improve the fiscal space. Reducing fraud and abuse of public funds is more challenging, and the savings may take

³⁰¹ 2020, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, [Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy: 2020-2030](#)

³⁰² 2020, UNDP Afghanistan, [Socio-Economic Impact Assessment: Fiscal Options in Response to Coronavirus Crisis](#).

³⁰³ 2020, 2020 Afghanistan Conference, [Afghanistan Partnership Framework, Actions 1.3 and 1.4, pages 6 and 7](#)

³⁰⁴ 2015, Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health, ICF, [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#)

longer to be realized. However, results will be rewarding in releasing funds that would have otherwise been wasted and building citizen trust. Combatting tax avoidance and tax evasion is another way to increase revenues.

Overall, there are significant financing gaps for implementing the medium-term objectives included in the ANPDF II and NPPs. The road to the 2030 SDGs will not be a simple one. Even if financing gaps are bridged, many uncertainties remain. Peace negotiations, pressure from fast-increasing populations, slow economic growth, and crises like droughts, floods, earthquakes, and the pandemic make for a volatile development environment. In addition, Afghanistan still faces constraints arising from limited implementation capacity to design, execute and monitor policies and projects. This limitation can affect the balance between investor interests driven by return on investment and the Government's development policy priorities based on their social impact. It can also result in a lack of policy coherence between short-term humanitarian assistance and social and environmental sustainability in the longer term. The result may be a siloed approach that fails to consider synergies and create multiplier effects. Leadership may find themselves acting reactively, managing disaster events rather than systematically managing and reducing *risks*.

F. RISKS AND STRENGTHS

Risks

Afghanistan faces multiple risks, many of which are outside its control. An immediate danger is the deterioration of the security situation and

uncertainties associated with the ongoing peace negotiations. Unless a peace agreement is reached and observed, progress toward economic and social development plans are likely to be derailed. A deterioration or even a prolonging of the current security situation will continue to divert government capacity away from necessary reforms, impeding essential services and disrupting the implementation of development projects.

The current conditions in Afghanistan, and the prospect of continuing conflict, point to a difficult road ahead. The risks and their implications for advancing progress towards the A-SDGs are presented in **ANNEX 2**.

A baseline scenario where violence is contained at its current level may still fail to accelerate economic and social progress unless political rivalries, factional manoeuvring, local antagonisms, patronage, corruption, unlawful coercion and the capture of institutions are reduced. Such divisions impede the enforcement of laws and compromise the implementation of policies.

Bridging these political divisions and agreeing on a new social contract will not be easy. Currently, the conventional view of State versus non-State structures applies only in part to Afghanistan. Authority in Afghanistan rests on horizontal relationships primarily among urban elements. In contrast, the vertical relationships between the State and citizens are affected by non-state parties, community leaders and armed groups. These groups compete and cooperate using polarized religious and ideological positions, control of economic resources and livelihoods,

and violence to maintain and expand their power. Moreover, such structures change only slowly. Improving governance and social services, building accountability and trust, and raising living standards takes consistent efforts over a long period.

Even if a peace agreement is reached, the future course of Afghanistan will range from stability to recurrence of conflict. The international experience suggests that the probability of reverting to conflict is significantly reduced only after a low-income country reaches a solid middle-income level status. Unfortunately, it will take decades for Afghanistan to reach that level. Today, per capita incomes are only around \$500 per year.

The case of COVID-19 has shown that there are regional risks in addition to domestic ones. The downturn in the host countries of Afghan migrant workers has increased the number of returnees and reduced remittances flow. Critical imports, including food supplies, have been disrupted, as have Afghanistan's exports to major trade partners such as India and Pakistan. There is a risk that if conflict does not recede, sub-regional economic integration will be delayed. The use of transboundary water resources and energy dependency create yet more uncertainty.

Economically, even improved growth rates would not make much difference in the short term, given the high rate of population growth. Rapid population growth is likely to constrain the expansion of public services whose quality is already the lowest in the world. It will also reduce the maintenance rates and the development of investments in

infrastructure, which is already insufficient.

Public expenditures may be further constrained by a decline in foreign aid, which could follow if Afghanistan fails to deliver its promised results – something that has partially happened with previous donor support.

At the current rate of progress, Afghanistan is likely to meet only 9 per cent of SDG targets by 2030. The scale of the effort required is beyond the reach of domestic fiscal and administrative capacity. If peace is achieved and growth resumes, then progress towards the SDGs will accelerate. Still, it will require international support,

Strengths

The vast majority (89 per cent) of Afghans support efforts to achieve peace. They also want to preserve freedom of speech and the press and oppose a peace agreement that would endanger women's education or their ability to work outside the home (65 per cent). Their views effectively amount to solid support for the Government's plan as articulated in ANPDF II and the goals included in A-SDGs.

The continuing international support to Afghanistan constitutes another important strength moving forward. The recently held donors' conference in Geneva (November 2020) reiterated the continuing support of the international community to Afghanistan by essentially maintaining previous levels of funding till 2024 – a total of \$12 billion. The future support of the international community will depend on Afghanistan making progress on what it has promised to deliver. That includes reaching an "Afghan-led and

Afghan-owned” inclusive and durable peace with respect for international humanitarian law, especially concerning the rights of women, minorities, displaced populations and returnees regardless of their ethnicity and beliefs.

At the regional level, peace can expand the trading opportunities between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. In addition, increased regional economic cooperation can increase support with Afghanistan to resolve the conflict.

Closer to home, while the fast population growth relative to economic growth acts against increases in per capita incomes and slows down the increase in the coverage of social services, it can pay a high dividend in the future. The fast-growing working-age population should reduce the dependency ratio if the fertility rate continues to fall.³⁰⁵ The dividend can become even more significant with supportive family planning, strong and resourceful essential reproductive and maternal health services. Adequate nutrition, health and education policies can also increase the size and quality of the country’s human capital and raise future productivity. Realizing the demographic dividend requires policies that increase job opportunities for the large numbers of unemployed and

underemployed, yet increasingly more educated, youth. The same goes for the case of women, whose participation in the economy remains limited despite substantial increases in their educational attainment.

An additional strength of the Afghan economy is the rich mineral deposits that have been barely (or only illicitly) exploited. Some deposits, such as copper, are among the largest known in the world. The total value of untapped minerals has been estimated at \$1 trillion. In addition to a peace agreement, success in this area would require the willingness of investors and the Government’s capacity to provide adequate regulatory and institutional frameworks and transportation infrastructure. They would also need to implement large contracts transparently and for the benefit of the people, for example, in terms of technology transfer and raising the skills and employment of nationals.

Afghanistan’s strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and China adds to the potential for economic growth. Once peace is achieved and the necessary infrastructure provided, it can serve as the regional transportation hub and transit routes for freight, electricity and natural gas.

³⁰⁵ 2019, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [World Population Prospects 2019, Afghanistan](#)

Annexes

ANNEX 1: Core Treaties, Conventions & Protocols to which Afghanistan is a Party

Human Rights Treaties	Signature Date	Ratification/Accession (a) Date
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	4 February 1985	1 April 1987
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (CAT-OP)		17 April 2018 (a)
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)		24 January 1983 (a)
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty (CCPR-OP2-DP)		
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED)		
Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art.32)		
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	14 August 1980	5 March 2003
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)		6 July 1983 (a)
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)		24 January 1983 (a)
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW)		
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	27 September 1990	28 March 1994
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC)		24 September 2003 (a)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC)		19 September 2002 (a)
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)		18 September 2012 (a)

Acceptance of Individual Complaints Procedures	Acceptance of Procedure	Date of acceptance/non-acceptance
Individual complaints procedure under the Convention against Torture (CAT, Art.22)	N/A	
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-OP1)	No	
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art.31)		

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-OP)		
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD, Art.14)	N/A	
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR-OP)	NO	
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW, Art. 77)		
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-OP-IC)		
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD-OP)	Yes	18 September 2012

Acceptance of Inquiry Procedures	Acceptance of Procedure	Date of acceptance/non-acceptance
Inquiry procedure under the Convention against Torture (CAT, Art.20)	No	1 April 1987
Inquiry procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art.33)		
Inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-OP, Art.8-9)		
Inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR-OP, Art.11)		
Inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-OP-IC, Art.13)		
Inquiry procedure under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD-OP, Art.6-7)		18 September 2012

Acceptance of the Interstate Communication Procedure	Signature Date	Ratification/Accession Date
Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art.32)		

ILO Conventions	Ratification/Accession Date	Status
Equal Remuneration Convention 1951	22 Aug 1969	In Force
Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957	16 May 1963	In Force
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958	01 Oct 1969	In Force
Minimum Age Convention 1973	07 Apr 2010	In Force
Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999	07 Apr 2010	In Force

Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention 1976	07 Apr 2010	In Force
Night Work (Women) Convention 1919	12 Jun 1939	Not in Force
White Lead (Painting) Convention 1921	12 Jun 1939	In Force
Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention 1921	12 Jun 1939	In Force
Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) 1934	12 Jun 1939	Not in Force
Underground Work (Women) Convention 1935	14 May 1937	In Force
Protection of Wages Convention 1949	07 Jan 1957	In Force
Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention 1957	16 May 1963	In Force
Dock Work Convention 1973	16 May 1979	In Force
Occupational Cancer Convention 1974	16 May 1979	In Force
Paid Educational Leave Convention 1974	16 May 1979	In Force
Rural Workers' Organizations Convention 1975	16 May 1979	In Force
Human Resources Development Convention 1975	16 May 1979	In Force
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention 1983	7 April 2010	In Force

Trade Agreements	Signature date	Accession/Entry Date
World Trade Organization (WTO)	17 Dec 2015	29 Jul 2016
India – Afghanistan Preferential Trade Agreement	6 March 2003	13 May 2003
South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) Accession of Afghanistan	3 August 2008	7 August 2011

Multilateral Agreements on Weapons and their Effects	Signature date	Accession/Entry Date
Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Ottawa Treaty)	11 September 2002	1 March 2003 ³⁰⁶
Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)	3 December 2008	1 March 2012 ³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ 2003, Mine Action Coordination Center of Afghanistan, [Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personal Mines and on their Destruction, Afghanistan](#)

³⁰⁷ 2012, Directorate of Mine Action Coordination, Afghanistan, [Convention on Cluster Munitions, Afghanistan](#)

Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects (with Protocols I, II and III) (CCW)	10 April 1981	9 August 2017 ³⁰⁸
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Multilateral Environmental Agreements	Status	Signature Date	Accession Date	Focal Point
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora	Accession	30 October 1985	28 January 1986	NEPA
United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity	Ratification	12 June 1992	19 September 2002	NEPA
The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety	Accession	15 May 2000	7 January 2013	NEPA
Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources	Accession	5 June 1992	In process	NEPA
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)	Party	1982	13 May 2013	NEPA
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification	Accession	1 Nov 1995	19 Sep 2002	MAIL
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	Ratification	20 June 1992	19 September 2002	MoFA
Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer	Accession	22 March 1985	17 June 2004	NEPA
Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer	Accession	16 September 1985	17 June 2004	NEPA
Kyoto Protocol		11 December 1997	3 December 2012	NEPA
The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal	Ratification	18 Oct 2005	7 Jan 2013	NEPA
Stockholm Convention on POPs	Accession	22 May 2001	7 Jan 2013	NEPA
Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent	Accession	10 Sep 1998	7 Jan 2013	NEPA
Minamata Convention on Mercury	Accession		Jan 2017	NEPA
Paris Agreement	Ratification	22 April 2016	15 Feb 17	NEPA
Sendai Framework			NA	ANDMA

³⁰⁸ [UN Treaties](#)

ANNEX 2: Multidimensional SDG Risk Analysis Matrix

Risk Definition (Affected SDGs)	Risk Factors/Analysis	Likelihood	Impact
Political stability (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing conflict with AGEs worsens the security situation in wider parts of the country. 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace agreement leads to intensification of factional manoeuvring and local rivalries 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace agreement leads to heightened patronage and state capture through the inclusion of AGEs in government 	High	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divisions within the Government paralysing the political process leads to commitment failure and a lack of coordination within Government 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide-spread corruption, inadequate enforcement of existing policies and laws resulting in a loss of legitimacy 	Medium	Medium
Democratic space (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminished political participation due to insecurity and disenchantment with the political process. 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace agreement leads to reduction of democratic space 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation of democratic processes through patronage or coercion. 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstruction of media, gender and human rights advocates views through targeted killing and other violent threats. 	High	Medium
Social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination (SDG 1, 5, 10 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further deprivation of basic services from marginalized groups because of their status (ethnicity, affiliation, gender etc.) 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace agreement reproduces the current balance of power, effectively reinforcing inequalities due increased elite capture of institutions need to ensure the introduction of effective national-scale social protection measures and a widening of the tax base 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurrence of conflict resulting in increased inequality, marginalization of vulnerable groups and human rights abuses and loss of national momentum for and localized roll-back of progress made on gender equality 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of peace agreement results in stress on government capacities, leading to stalling of anti-corruption and anti-discrimination efforts 	Medium	High
Economic and financial stability (SDG 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid reduction in foreign aid as a result of not meeting conditionalities results in shortfalls in the government budget, depreciation of the currency and inflation (especially in food and energy) 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass unemployment, especially among the youth, due to the lack of education and training opportunities. 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged economic downturns in the host countries of Afghan migrant workers, resulting in reduced remittances flows and larger number of returnees 	Medium	High

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disruption to economic activities due to worsening security situation, natural disasters or extreme climate conditions 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of state presence and rural economic growth perpetuates control of illicit poppy cultivation by criminal groups and AGEs 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure to regularize illicit mining perpetuates criminality and warlords 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Widespread use of foreign currencies, eventually replacing the national currency 	Low	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disruption to supplies of food and energy imports due to adverse conditions in the supplier countries or a health crisis similar to the Covid-19 pandemic. 	Low	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Downturn in major export markets (India and Pakistan) 	Low	Medium
Regional and global influences (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weakening of international commitment to Afghan peace and development results in reduction of funding for security, humanitarian and development needs 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continued conflict in Afghanistan leads to deferral of sub-regional economic integration 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Return of Afghan fighters from Syria 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deterioration of the relationship with Pakistan 	Low	Medium
Internal security (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collapse of the peace of process and escalation of war between the government and AGEs over ideology, national power and resources 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worsening disputes between ethnic groups over subnational predominance and resources (e.g., Kuchi Nomads versus Hazara, or Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara militias versus Pashtun and foreign fighters) 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in sectarian violence (e.g., against Afghan Shias), persecution of minorities 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spread of organized crime, illicit trafficking, etc. 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased attacks on infrastructure 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worsening conflicts over land, water and other resources 	High	High
Justice and rule of law (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● De facto acceptance of separate, parallel court-based and traditional justice systems 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of confidence in court system leads to popular rejection of rule of law 	High	High

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peace agreement leads to deterioration of enforcement of human rights and gender equality 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing use of torture by security forces resulting in a loss of faith in the justice system and normalization of human rights abuse 	Medium	High
Infrastructure and access to social services (SDG 4, 6, 7, 9, 11 & 17)	General		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further decline in access to basic services due to declining government revenues Natural disasters disrupting the delivery of public services 	High	High
	Education		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced access to education. Contributing factors include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attacks on schools, forced migration, and chronic emergencies inefficient coordination mechanism within the ministry and relevant authorities lack of school coverage; overcrowded classrooms; shortage of textbooks and teaching materials lack of alternative education options Gender-based abuse in schools Traditional and gendered social norms and practices (more than 2 million girls are out of school, widespread domestic violence) Social exclusion of and discrimination against children with disabilities, returnees, and internally displaced population Low labour force participation rate 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality and spread of education services deteriorates due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited education public financing (3% of GDP spent on education since 2017) Shortage of qualified teachers, especially female (only 43% of teachers meet the minimum qualification) Weak educational management information system (EMIS) Lack of standardized assessments Absence of national examination system Overcrowded curriculum with limited focus on competencies 	Medium	High
	Infrastructure		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to infrastructure restricted due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing number of users inadequate investment 	High	High	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited asset management systems - Insecurity hampering infrastructure construction, rehabilitation and maintenance - damage from climate change and natural disasters 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Returnees without sufficient access to basic services due to the lack of provision in the areas of returnees 	High	Medium
Displacement and migration (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure of inclusion of refugees, IDPs, returnees, and marginalized (including perceived affiliation) into national systems and development programmes 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Security and justice mechanism failing to protect returnees or the displaced 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased tensions among displaced populations and host communities due to access to limited resources 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failed reintegration fuelling armed conflicts and criminal activities 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drought and local conflict cause significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons 	Medium	Medium
Public health (SDG 3 & 17)	Health systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced donor support and inadequate domestic resource allocation to health. Afghanistan has one of the highest out of pocket expenditure and it shows high public health system dependency on donor support. 	High	High
	Maternal, new-born and child health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worsening of the maternal, infant and child mortality rates due to limited access and poor quality of MNCH services. Afghanistan is one of the countries with the highest mortality rates. 	High	High
	Family planning (FP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shortages and stock out of contraceptive supplies at service delivery points of public health facilities due to lack of a functional supply chain management mechanism for FP commodities. According to AFDHS 2015 there is a high unmet need of 25% and a high contraceptive discontinuation rate of 26%. ● Failure in FP due to low utilization and poor quality of FP services, particularly the FP counselling; and low coverage long-acting reversible contraceptives. ● Increase in early pregnancy due to poor access and limited capacity of youth friendly services. 	High	High
	Disease control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outbreaks of diseases due to inefficient control and restricted access to diagnosis and treatment services. Programmes are donor dependent. There is no predictably sustained financial support for 	High	High

	<p>continuous control and/or elimination of some communicable diseases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure of vaccination programmes due to limited access. During the EPI monitoring between April – June 2020, it has been found that 25–35% of the health facilities are showing a decline in the uptake of MCV1 (Measles Containing Vaccine) and Pentavalent vaccines, as compared to the corresponding period of last year. ● Growing number of polio cases due to lack of reach to eligible children for vaccination (because of bans and insecurity); and funding gaps. ● Covid-19 continuing to impact on already vulnerable population. Capacity for testing and case management continues to be limited. 		
Food security, agriculture, and land (SDG 2 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risk of severe shortage of food arising from poor harvests due to environmental degradation, disruption of imports or increases in global food prices. Threats to domestic food production include plant pests, insect infestations, animal diseases, desertification, and land degradation. 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Population growth and inter-generational division of family plots reduce viability of rural livelihoods 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continued exclusion of women from land ownership and agricultural support services 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure to introduce effective and efficient system for resolution of land disputes 	High	High
Environment and climate (SDG 12, 13, 14, 15 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple-ecological threats that are not dealt with effectively due to siloed institutional responsibilities and policies has a mutually reinforcing multiplier effect that cannot be managed effectively. 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unsustainable economic growth policies increase the rate of environmental degradation leading to increased conflict as availability of natural resources declines 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poorly planned agricultural intensification and urban encroachment onto land most suitable for agriculture leads to declining yields due to increasing environmental impact 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extreme weather events increasingly result in damage to infrastructure such as roads, bridges, hydro power plants, reversing development gains 	High	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Socio-ecological impacts reduce community resilience resulting in increased poverty, migration and need for humanitarian assistance 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continued high population growth, unregulated use of groundwater in urban areas, and lack of green energy for heating and cooking result in accelerating environmental degradation 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of transboundary water resources leads to inter-State conflict 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure to recognize biodiversity loss as the most serious ecological threat to future prosperity facing the country, combined with environmental degradation, seriously constrains the 	High	High

	Government's ability to achieve self-reliance		
Political stability (SDG 16 & 17)	● Ongoing conflict with AGEs worsens the security situation in wider parts of the country.	High	High
	● Peace agreement leads to intensification of factional manoeuvring and local rivalries	High	High
	● Peace agreement leads to heightened patronage and state capture through the inclusion of AGEs in government	High	Medium
	● Divisions within the Government paralysing the political process leads to commitment failure and a lack of coordination within Government	Medium	High
	● Wide-spread corruption, inadequate enforcement of existing policies and laws resulting in a loss of legitimacy	Medium	Medium
Democratic space (SDG 16 & 17)	● Diminished political participation due to insecurity and disenchantment with the political process.	Medium	Medium
	● Peace agreement leads to reduction of democratic space	Medium	High
	● Manipulation of democratic processes through patronage or coercion.	Medium	High
	● Obstruction of media, gender and human rights advocates views through targeted killing and other violent threats.	High	Medium
Social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination (SDG 1, 5, 10 & 17)	● Further deprivation of basic services from marginalized groups because of their status (ethnicity, affiliation, gender etc.)	High	High
	● Peace agreement reproduces the current balance of power, effectively reinforcing inequalities due increased elite capture of institutions need to ensure the introduction of effective national-scale social protection measures and a widening of the tax base	High	High
	● Recurrence of conflict resulting in increased inequality, marginalization of vulnerable groups and human rights abuses and loss of national momentum for and localized roll-back of progress made on gender equality	Medium	High
	● Lack of peace agreement results in stress on government capacities, leading to stalling of anti-corruption and anti-discrimination efforts	Medium	High
Economic and financial stability (SDG 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10)	● Rapid reduction in foreign aid as a result of not meeting conditionalities results in shortfalls in the government budget, depreciation of the currency and inflation (especially in food and energy)	High	High
	● Mass unemployment, especially among the youth, due to the lack of education and training opportunities.	High	High
	● Prolonged economic downturns in the host countries of Afghan migrant workers, resulting in reduced remittances flows and larger number of returnees	Medium	High
	● Disruption to economic activities due to worsening security situation, natural disasters or extreme climate conditions	Medium	High

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of state presence and rural economic growth perpetuates control of illicit poppy cultivation by criminal groups and AGEs 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to regularize illicit mining perpetuates criminality and warlords 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread use of foreign currencies, eventually replacing the national currency 	Low	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to supplies of food and energy imports due to adverse conditions in the supplier countries or a health crisis similar to the Covid-19 pandemic. 	Low	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downturn in major export markets (India and Pakistan) 	Low	Medium
Regional and global influences (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weakening of international commitment to Afghan peace and development results in reduction of funding for security, humanitarian and development needs 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued conflict in Afghanistan leads to deferral of sub-regional economic integration 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return of Afghan fighters from Syria 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deterioration of the relationship with Pakistan 	Low	Medium
Internal security (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collapse of the peace of process and escalation of war between the government and AGEs over ideology, national power and resources 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening disputes between ethnic groups over subnational predominance and resources (e.g., Kuchi Nomads versus Hazara, or Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara militias versus Pashtun and foreign fighters) 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in sectarian violence (e.g., against Afghan Shias), persecution of minorities 	Medium	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread of organized crime, illicit trafficking, etc. 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased attacks on infrastructure 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening conflicts over land, water and other resources 	High	High
Justice and rule of law (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De facto acceptance of separate, parallel court-based and traditional justice systems 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence in court system leads to popular rejection of rule of law 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace agreement leads to deterioration of enforcement of human rights and gender equality 	High	High

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing use of torture by security forces resulting in a loss of faith in the justice system and normalization of human rights abuse 	Medium	High
Infrastructure and access to social services (SDG 4, 6, 7, 9, 11 & 17)	General		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further decline in access to basic services due to declining government revenues 	High	High
	Education		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced access to education. Contributing factors include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attacks on schools, forced migration, and chronic emergencies inefficient coordination mechanism within the ministry and relevant authorities lack of school coverage; overcrowded classrooms; shortage of textbooks and teaching materials lack of alternative education options Gender-based abuse in schools Traditional and gendered social norms and practices (more than 2 million girls are out of school, widespread domestic violence) Social exclusion of and discrimination against children with disabilities, returnees, and internally displaced population Low labour force participation rate 	High	High
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	Infrastructure		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to infrastructure restricted due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing number of users inadequate investment limited asset management systems Insecurity hampering infrastructure construction, rehabilitation and maintenance 	High	High	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returnees without sufficient access to basic services due to the lack of provision in the areas of returnees 	High	Medium
Displacement and migration (SDG 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure of inclusion of refugees, IDPs, returnees, and marginalized (including perceived affiliation) into national systems and development programmes 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security and justice mechanism failing to protect returnees or the displaced 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased tensions among displaced populations and host communities due to access to limited resources 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failed reintegration fuelling armed conflicts and criminal activities 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drought and local conflict cause significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons 	Medium	Medium
Public health (SDG 3 & 17)	Health systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced donor support and inadequate domestic resource allocation to health. Afghanistan has one of the highest out of pocket expenditure and it shows high public health system dependency on donor support. 	High	High
	Maternal, new-born and child health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worsening of the maternal, infant and child mortality rates due to limited access and poor quality of MNCH services. Afghanistan is one of the countries with the highest mortality rates. 	High	High
	Family planning (FP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shortages and stock out of contraceptive supplies at service delivery points of public health facilities due to lack of a functional supply chain management mechanism for FP commodities. According to AfDHS 2015 there is a high unmet need of 25% and a high contraceptive discontinuation rate of 26%. Failure in FP due to low utilization and poor quality of FP services, particularly the FP counselling; and low coverage long-acting reversible contraceptives. Increase in early pregnancy due to poor access and limited capacity of youth friendly services. 	High	High
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	<p>Pentavalent vaccines, as compared to the corresponding period of last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Growing number of polio cases due to lack of reach to eligible children for vaccination (because of bans and insecurity); and funding gaps. ● Covid-19 continuing to impact on already vulnerable population. Capacity for testing and case management continues to be limited. 		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Population growth and inter-generational division of family plots reduce viability of rural livelihoods 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continued exclusion of women from land ownership and agricultural support services 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure to introduce effective and efficient system for resolution of land disputes 	High	High
Environment and climate (SDG 12, 13, 14, 15 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple-ecological threats that are not dealt with effectively due to siloed institutional responsibilities and policies has a mutually reinforcing multiplier effect that cannot be managed effectively. 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unsustainable economic growth policies increase the rate of environmental degradation leading to increased conflict as availability of natural resources declines 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poorly planned agricultural intensification and urban encroachment onto land most suitable for agriculture leads to declining yields due to increasing environmental impact 	High	High
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Socio-ecological impacts reduce community resilience resulting in increased poverty, migration and need for humanitarian assistance 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continued high population growth, unregulated use of groundwater in urban areas, and lack of green energy for heating and cooking result in accelerating environmental degradation 	High	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of transboundary water resources leads to inter-State conflict 	Medium	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure to recognize biodiversity loss as the most serious ecological threat to future prosperity facing the country, combined with environmental degradation, seriously constrains the Government's ability to achieve self-reliance 	High	High

ENDNOTES