

Multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan



©UNICEF Afghanistan/Karimi

The Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index (A-MPI), computed by the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) is an official permanent national poverty statistic based on the data from the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2016–17. The A-MPI is the first national report on multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan and contains data on both monetary and multidimensional poverty for children in Afghanistan, for the first time ever. A-MPI reflects the priorities presented in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017- 2021.

Why is it important to measure multidimensional poverty?

The importance of reducing multidimensional poverty is recognized in the SDGs, with explicit mention of children. SDG target 1.2 is by 2030, to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

Measuring multidimensional poverty is important because it complements measures of monetary poverty – it analyses other aspects of wellbeing and the fulfilment of human rights and child rights. There is no neat overlap between multidimensional and monetary poverty, with some people affected by only one type of poverty. Measuring multidimensional poverty therefore allows us to identify children and adults affected by poverty in multiple ways, or who could be missed out by other measures. The policy responses to multidimensional poverty may be different from those designed to alleviate monetary poverty.

Measuring child poverty is of high importance because children constitute a large proportion of the population of Afghanistan, with more than half the population below the age of 18. Research on multidimensional poverty measures the access of children to goods and services that are fundamental for their full development and essential for the fulfilment of their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is essential to pay attention to child poverty because children are more vulnerable and experience poverty differently from and more severely than adults. Poverty in childhood can have lifelong and sometimes irreversible consequences because of lost opportunities. Investing in children is essential to fulfill their rights and for the future skills-based economy and economic growth of the country.

How is the A-MPI calculated?

The A-MPI comprises five dimensions and 18 indicators that were selected in a consultative process with high-level policymakers in the country and technical experts.

The five dimensions of the MPI are: **education, health, living standards, work, and exposure to shocks**. A person is identified as poor if he or she is deprived in at least 40% or more of the dimensions or weighted indicators. The proportion of people living in multidimensional poverty and the intensity of their poverty are combined in the value of the MPI.

What is the level and pattern of poverty in Afghanistan?

52% of Afghans live in multidimensional poverty. Poverty is higher among children than the overall population, and it is highest among the youngest children: More than 56% of children aged 0–17 live in multidimensional poverty, rising to 57% among children aged 0–9. Less than 49% of people aged 18 and above are MPI poor. 58% of poor people are children.

The intensity of poverty is also slightly higher for children, meaning that they face deprivations in more areas of their lives than adults.

The shape and composition of multidimensional poverty varies widely across the country. The urban poverty rate is 18%, whereas the rural rate is 61%. It is estimated that 89% of the Kuchi population live in multidimensional poverty. Stark differences are found across provinces too. While 15% of the population in Kabul are affected by multidimensional poverty, the poverty rate reaches 80% in Nooristan and 86% in Badghis. Considering the size of the population in each province, Herat and Nangarhar are home to the highest number of poor people.

In urban areas, more than 20% of children aged 0–17 are multidimensionally poor – an alarming figure compared to other age groups in urban areas, which have poverty ratios of around 15%. Rural poverty is even higher, and children are again found to be the age group who suffer it the most: **Around 65% of children in rural areas are multidimensionally poor.**

The level of multidimensional poverty is higher among large households, and households where the head has no education.

The 2016–17 A-MPI value is 0.272, indicating that poor people in Afghanistan experience more than 27% of the deprivations that could be faced if all the population were deprived in all indicators.

Across all age groups, the highest contributions to poverty come from food security, assisted delivery, and school attendance. For all the age groups, these three indicators combined account for more than one-third of their corresponding MPI value.

How does multidimensional poverty compare with monetary poverty?



Comparing levels of multidimensional and monetary poverty, while 52% of the overall population is affected by multidimensional poverty, 55% live in monetary poverty.

The level of monetary poverty is higher among children than adults, **with 58% of children living in monetary poverty, which rises to 61% among children aged 0-9.**

40% of children aged 0–17 are identified as poor in both monetary and MPI terms – they are the most severely affected by poverty.

Recommendations

The key motivation for designing an MPI in Afghanistan is to guide evidence-based policies and programmes that accelerate poverty reduction. For children, policies and interventions to improve their health, survival chances, education and skills will affect their potential in the future and hence should be a priority. Improving food security and nutrition, maternal health and school attendance will contribute the most to multidimensional poverty reduction. Because deprivations are interlinked, and children and families experience overlapping disadvantages, an emphasis on integrated multisectoral policies and programmes is essential.

Because children are a particularly vulnerable group, with specific needs according to their age, there is a need to pay attention to children and their families in national budgets and invest with equity in children.