

Afghanistan



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General Country Profile



Population: estimated at 32.2 million – 18.8 million (59 per cent) aged 0–18 years and 5.6 million under-five children.

- Rural: 71 per cent
- Urban: 24 per cent
- Nomadic: 5 per cent



The first-ever direct peace talks between Government of Afghanistan and Taliban present a momentous opportunity to advance a durable and lasting peace for every child.



52 per cent of the population and 56 per cent of children live in multidimensional poverty. 40 per cent of children are identified as poor in both monetary and multidimensional terms.



Economic growth: 2.9 per cent in 2019 (World Bank).



Afghanistan is one of the largest recipients of overseas development assistance and highly aid-dependent, but domestic revenues are increasing.



The country has significantly advanced its legislative and policy frameworks in favour of children's rights. Yet, armed conflict and political crises compounded by poverty, natural disasters, endemic corruption, underlying water scarcity and COVID19 pandemic severely hamper the implementation of legislative changes.



Insecurity is increasing, driven by weak governance, unfair resource distribution and poverty. Conflicts have caused high population movement, including cross-border refugees and internally displaced persons.



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The ongoing conflict is one of the deadliest in the world for civilians, and the continued impact on women and children is of great concern. During the first half of 2020, 3,458 civilian casualties were reported, including 1,067 child casualties. A total of 340 children killed and 727 injured (553 boys, 499 girls and 15 of unknown gender). More than 50 per cent of the injuries and deaths of children resulted from ground engagements, particularly indirect fire in civilian areas. The destructive impact of Explosive Remnants of War (ERWs) on children continues to be an enormous issue. In addition, there were 397 female casualties (138 killed and 259 injured).



Despite the significant decrease of grave violations against 426 children (312 boys, 111 girls and 3 unknown gender) in Q1, there was a 64 per cent increase in grave violations against 674 children (465 boys, 210 girls) in Q2, mostly perpetrated by the Taliban in the northeastern region.



COVID-19-related factors such as school closures, economic pressures and lockdowns have probably increased the vulnerability of children to recruitment and abduction. There is a high likelihood of underreporting due to the security threats.



Due to the highly sensitive nature and cultural stigma of rape and sexual violence, gender-based violence is underreported.



The situation of 150 children detained on allegations of association with Taliban and ISIS remains unchanged since 2019. Collective efforts will be exerted to ensure that children are treated as victims of international law violations. UNICEF is urging the Government of Afghanistan / National Security to release them due to COVID-19, provide them access to child protection services and legal support, and ensure due process within the Juvenile Justice System: some of the children have been detained for more than seven years.



Amid COVID19 pandemic, schools were closed, and 10 million children lost out on learning. In Afghanistan, 3.7 million children are out of school, 60 per cent are girls. In some areas, 8 out of 10 girls are not going to school. And more importantly, many children are at risk of not returning back to school.



In Afghanistan, the Ministry of Public Health reported a significant reduction in attendance in health facilities. Out of fear of contracting COVID19 virus at health facilities, families are de-prioritizing pre and post-natal care, adding to the risks faced by pregnant women and newborns.

The deteriorating economic situation resulted in loss of jobs and income, and staple food prices spiked by up to 38 per cent, further exacerbating the nutritional situation of children and their families. As a result, and since the onset of COVID19 pandemic, the number of under five children with severe acute malnutrition has risen by 90,000 from 690,000 to 780,000.





Afghanistan Key Indicators on Children

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Under-five mortality	55 per 1,000 live births	2015	Demographic Health Survey (DHS)
Maternal mortality	235-1,882 per 100,000 live births	2015	Provincial rates, DHS
Stunting in under-five children	41% (50% of these are severely stunted)	2013	National Nutrition Survey (NNS)
Wasting in under-five children	10%	2013	NNS
Fully immunized children (12-23 months)	46%	2015	DHS
Net primary school attendance (Grades 1-6)	56% (46% girls; 66% boys)	2016 2017	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS)
Survival/retention in primary education	85% (83% girls; 87% boys)	2016 2017	ALCS
Adult literacy	35% (50% male; 20% female)	2016 2017	ALCS
Birth registration (under five children)	42%	2015	DHS





Biggest challenges facing children and UNICEF targets for 2015–2021

A mid-term review (MTR) was undertaken in 2017, which helped to rationalize the outputs of the current Country Programme Document. At the outcome level, UNICEF will continue to contribute to the following:

- **Health:** Improved access and increased use of quality and equity-focused maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) and immunization services for mothers, newborns, under-five children and adolescent girls in the most deprived provinces and areas.
- **WASH:** Improved and equitable use of safe drinking water, sanitation, and healthy environments and improved hygiene practices in the most deprived provinces and vulnerable areas.
- **Nutrition:** Improved coverage and increased utilization of quality and equitable nutrition services for under-five children, adolescent girls and mothers in the most deprived provinces and areas.
- **Education:** Girls and boys of school age, especially vulnerable children in deprived provinces and areas, access primary education that is progressively child-friendly and demonstrates improved learning outcomes.
- **Child protection:** Girls and boys vulnerable and exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation are better protected by institutional (formal and informal) and legislative frameworks, including services and systems.

Humanitarian crisis

- More than half of the population of Afghanistan – nearly 17 million people – live in conflict-affected areas, and 103 districts have been assessed as hardest to reach.
- Since January 2020, some 364,000 people have returned to Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan and other countries, and about 132,800 (58 per cent children) have been displaced by conflict and disasters. One third of school-aged children (3.7 million children, including 2.2 million girls) are out of school, and 2 million of these children live in conflict-affected areas.
- An estimated 2 million under-five children and 485,000 pregnant and lactating women are affected by acute malnutrition, and nearly 600,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in 2020.
- The 2019 estimated number of people in need is 6.3 million, including 3.8 million children in need; for 2020 this number rises to 9.4 million, including 5.1 million children.
- UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) 2018-2021 amounts to USD 131 million; the HAC appeal for 2020 is USD 72.05 million.



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COVID-19 crisis

- The humanitarian consequences of COVID-19 are now affecting every aspect of life and threatening the survival and well-being of the most vulnerable.
- The situation is made worse by the stretched national health system, porous borders, restricted movements due to lockdowns and high numbers of displaced people living close together with limited access to basic services including water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- School closures mean that approximately 9.5 million children are not attending school, in addition to the approximately 3.7 children who were already out-of-school.
- The 2020 revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) estimates that 35 million people (nearly 93 per cent of the population) need an emergency social safety net and that 14 million of them need humanitarian assistance. The HRP requires USD 1.1 billion to provide for the humanitarian needs of 11.1 million people.
- The UNICEF Afghanistan response focuses on enhancing preventive and preparedness measures to contain, mitigate and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. The response addresses the pandemic's direct and indirect health and collateral impacts of the pandemic linked to WASH, Education, Protection and essential Health and Nutrition services.
- The Corporate Emergency Level-3 Emergency Procedure for the global COVID-19 pandemic will guide UNICEF Afghanistan's response until the end of 2020.
- The total budget requirement of UNICEF Afghanistan Covid-19 Response Plan is USD 81.43 million for the year 2020.



Type of UNICEF programme, presence and partnerships and salient issues

- The UNICEF Country Programme (2015–2019) has been extended to 2021 to enable UNICEF to align with the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) (2017–2021) and the National Priority Programmes (NPPs), as well as with the extension of the present United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which has been approved by the regional United Nations Development Group (UNDG) team until the end of 2021. The CPD envelope totals USD 957.4 million (USD 293.6 million regular resources and USD 663.8 million other resources).
- UNICEF leads Nutrition and WASH clusters, co-leads Education in Emergencies and coordinates the Child Protection sub-cluster.
- The Programme is a mix of upstream policy work and downstream work with focus on service delivery, the current Programme has a large-scale humanitarian response that incorporates a nexus to development and resilience building.
- The main office is in Kabul and there are five zonal offices and eight 'outposts'. There are 394 staff (77 IP, 143 NO and 174 GS staff).
- UNICEF is implementing programmes in all 34 provinces of the country in partnership with government counterparts from the Ministries of Public Health; Education; Labour and Social Affairs; Justice; Interior; and Rural Rehabilitation and Development; along with 40 I/NGOs.
- In 2019, UNICEF reached over 12 million children through its development and humanitarian interventions.
- UNICEF is grant agent of the 2018-2021 Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Multi-Year Programme and Global Partners for Education (GPE) accelerated funding.
- Afghanistan benefits from Global Polio Eradication Initiative.
- In 2017, Afghanistan joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and formed the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSEN-A).
- An active monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) Taskforce in Afghanistan is co-chaired by UNICEF Representative and Resident Coordinator (RC).



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