

AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY REPORT



POPULATION

According to the Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority, the population of Afghanistan is estimated to be around 32.5 million as of 2019, whereas the CIA estimates it at 36.5 million and the UN around 38 million.

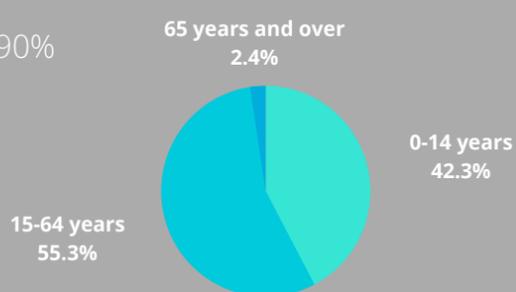
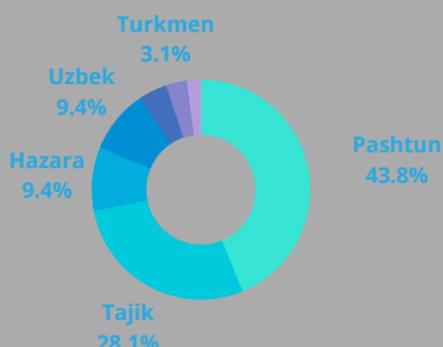
Afghanistan's population is divided into several ethnolinguistic groups. The four major ethnic groups are the Pashtuns, Tajik, Hazaras and Uzbeks. Other minority groups include Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashayi, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab and others.

Dari and Pashto are the official languages in Afghanistan. Most of the population is bilingual. Dari remains the preferred language for government and administration.

More than 99% of the Afghan population is Muslim, with as much as 90% following Sunni domination.



1/3 of the population (approx. 43%) is younger than 14 years old.



<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html><https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/nsia-estimates-afghanistan-population-329m>
<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/50002021b/afghanistan-fact-sheet.html>
<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/afghanistan-population/>

REFUGEES

According to data from UNHCR and IOM, there are nearly 2.7 million registered refugees from Afghanistan in 70 countries around the world. Refugees from Afghanistan comprise the largest protracted refugee population in Asia, and the second largest in the world. Children below the age of 14 account for half of the Afghan refugees.

The increasingly deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to drive people from their homes in search of safety.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS



There are over 1 million IDPs within Afghanistan. The majority are as direct or indirect result of conflict and violence. The Soviet invasion in 1979, followed by the Afghan civil war (1992-96) and the Taliban rule has led to millions to flee to other areas of the country.

<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/01/26/NA012617-Return-of-Afghan-Refugees-to-Afghanistan-Surges-Country-Copes-Rebuild>

HEALTH AND DISEASE

According to health indicators measured by UNDP, Afghanistan is the **15th least developed country in the world**. In 2006, It was reported that nearly 60% of the Afghan population lives within a two-hour walk to the nearest health facility which has not significantly improved by 2016. Access to essential health services is limited due to ongoing conflict, including bans on vaccinations, closures or even attacks on health facilities. Ongoing conflict significantly impacts the **reproductive health** of women, as well as the number of individuals with **trauma-related injuries**, due to the limited access to essential services.

1/4 of children under 5 are malnourished

0.28 physicians per 1,000 people

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/AFG.pdf
https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/afg/COPub_AFG_Situation_rep_july_2019_EN.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

ECONOMY OF AFGHANISTAN

According to the World Bank, Afghanistan's economy grew by an estimated 2.9 percent in 2019, driven mainly by agricultural growth although its economy suffered from the consequences of a severe drought that affected the agriculture production in 2018. In addition, lingering political uncertainty dampens private confidence and investment, with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan recording 3,403 civilian casualties in 2019, and more than 1.1 million Afghans internally displaced due to conflict.

In the last decade, there is progress recorded within certain key development indicators such as infrastructure and transportation. However, Afghanistan continues to experience insecurity, conflict and political uncertainty. Its unemployment rate is 23.9% and about 54.5% of its population lives below the poverty line.

Afghanistan is the origin of one of the largest opium producing and trading markets. For many Afghans, the poppy seed has become key to their livelihood, many being involved in the illicit trade. Over 50% of the villages producing opium are controlled by non-state actors, including the Taliban who tend to collect a lot of taxes on the trade.

Close to 90% of the world's opium comes from Afghanistan



Afghanistan's trade with other countries is steadily increasing. Afghan handwoven rugs are one of the most popular products for exportation. Other products include hand crafted antique replicas as well as leather and furs.



Afghanistan is world's third largest exporter of cashmere

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview>
https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2018_socioeconomic_report.pdf
<https://www.heritage.org/index/country/afghanistan>

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THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN

From 1996, Taliban forces displaced the officials of Islamic State of Afghanistan and established a totalitarian Islamic state, known for their radical rule and as what the Taliban believed to be the early Islamic model. At its peak, the Taliban ruled 95% of the country while the remaining parts in the northeast were held by the Northern Alliance, who maintained recognition as a continuation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. In 2001, once the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden for his involvement in the attacks on September 11, a US-led international coalition formed and proceeded to military action on the ground. The Taliban was officially ousted from power in November, 2001. In December 2001, the Afghan Interim Administration was formed as a result of a meeting under the UN auspices in Germany. It was followed by a two-year Afghan Transition Administration. At the same time, the UN Security Council authorised the creation of the International Security Assistance Force to help provide basic security for the population in Afghanistan, which led to many NATO member countries to send troops to Afghanistan.

In 2003, a new constitution was adopted and in 2004, presidential elections were held. Since then, Afghanistan is a presidential Islamic republic. However, the country's politics continue to suffer with insecurity and corruption, which lie a range of deeper problems related to the way in which the Afghan political system has developed.

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-afghanistan>
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/transition>

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

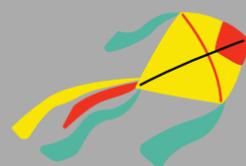
Human rights in Afghanistan is a topic of some controversy and debate. In 2019, military operations between Afghan and US government forces and the Taliban intensified resulting in more than 8000 reported casualties for less than a year time. While the Taliban were well known for numerous inflicted human rights abuses, violations continue to be reported in the post-Taliban times. Afghan security forces have been accused of committing killings and torture. In addition, there have been many reported human rights violations on Afghan civilians committed by American soldiers as well as civilian casualties as a result of governmental or US military operations. Civilians continuously suffered crimes under International Law, including violations and abuses because of the ongoing conflict violating International Humanitarian Law. Moreover, many thousands of people have been victims of enforced disappearance over the past forty years. The country overall suffers from high levels of terrorism, poverty, child malnutrition and corruption.

According to multiple reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, MSF violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Law continue to take place, including attacks on civilians, healthcare providers and facilities, as well as the use of rape as a weapon of war.



Homosexuality is taboo in Afghan society punished by up to a year in prison. Under Sharia law, the penalty can be death sentence. An ancient practice involving male homosexual acts between children and older men (typically wealthy or elite people) called *bacha bazi* reportedly persists up to this day. This act is also illegal under the Penal Code and offenders can be imprisoned. However, security officials often state they are unable to end such practices as many of the men involved are powerful and well-armed warlords.

Children's rights are of particular concern in Afghanistan. A report published by UNICEF refers to Afghanistan as 'the worst place to be born in the world'. Afghan children are subject to extreme poverty, violence and exploitation on daily basis. Malnutrition, child mortality, forced child marriages, sexual abuse, lack of access to drinking water, restricted access to education due to terrorist attacks on school, lack of infrastructure and security, as well as child labour and child soldiers are among the many problems facing Afghan children on daily basis.



During the time of the Taliban rule, **women** had virtually all their rights taken away. According to the US-based NGO Global Rights, nowadays, almost 90% of women in Afghanistan have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse or forced marriage. The perpetrators of these crimes are often the families of the victim. Additionally, in April 2020, a report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems on violence against women in elections noted growing use of social media to discredit and humiliate women candidates, as well as prevalent social barriers to women voters, alongside the high rates of sexual harassment and violence against women in Afghan public life. Gender-based violence against women and girls persists due to weak rule of law and existence of harmful traditional practices.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press is permitted and promoted in the current 2004 Constitution, so long as it does not threaten national or religious integrity. Reporters without Borders ranks Afghanistan at 121st place in press freedom. However, many issues regarding human rights and violence towards journalists exist contrary to the law.



In 2020, attacks on human rights defenders have increased in comparison to previous years. Nine human rights defenders have been killed since the start of 2020. Human rights defenders in Afghanistan face intimidation, harassment, detention, death and other attacks from both state and non-state armed groups. Impunity and lack of accountability measures continue to persist.

The National Directorate of Security, which is Afghanistan's security agency, has been frequently accused of running its own prisons, torturing suspects, killing civilians during raids and intimidating journalists. Meanwhile, security forces of local militias, have been accused of torture and arbitrary killings. UN experts continuously demand Afghanistan's government to take early decisive actions against these atrocities.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/afghanistan>
<https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/bacha-bazi-the-tragedy-of-afghanistans-dancing-boys/>
https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/afghanistan/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&gclid=EAIaIQobChMluZ_IJLP6wIVBPuyCh2CGgrHEAAAYASAAEgL4vFD_BwE
<https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/child-protection>