

Burattini, Beatriz; Osorio, Rafael Guerreiro; Wagner, Louisa; Markhof, Yannick; Arruda, Pedro

**Research Report**

## Afghanistan: Needs assessment

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## Afghanistan: Needs assessment

Beatriz Burattini, Rafael Guerreiro Osorio, Louisa Wagner, Yannick Markhof and Pedro Arruda,  
International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)



Research Report No. 66

**Afghanistan: Needs assessment**

By Beatriz Burattini, Rafael Guerreiro Osorio, Louisa Wagner, Yannick Markhof and Pedro Arruda

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# **AFGHANISTAN: NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>IE&amp;LF</b>	Income and Expenditure & Labour Force Survey
<b>MCCG</b>	Maintenance and Construction Cash Grant
<b>NSIA</b>	National Statistics and Information Authority
<b>PL</b>	Poverty line
<b>PwD</b>	People with disabilities

# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Methodology	12
1.2 Limitations	17
<b>2. POPULATION</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 Children	19
2.2 People with disabilities	20
2.3 Elderly people	21
2.4 Population by province	21
2.5 Urban, rural and Kuchi populations	22
<b>3. HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Household types	23
3.2 Children in households	25
3.3 Individuals aged 14 years or older in households	27
3.4 Elderly people in households	30
3.5 People with disabilities in households	32
3.6 Dependency ratios	32
<b>4. VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1 Poverty	33
4.2 Multidimensional poverty	34

4.3 Employment	36
4.4 Education	41
4.5 Nutrition	46
<b>5. SHOCKS AND COPING MECHANISMS</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>6. USAGE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION</b>	<b>50</b>
6.1 Pre-COVID-19 social protection	51
6.2 Social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic	52
<b>7. DISCUSSION: NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>53</b>
7.1 Factors potentially linked to vulnerability	53
7.2 Demographic context of vulnerability	55
<b>ANNEXES</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>61</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Occupied districts as of November 2019	17
<b>Figure 2.</b> Occupied districts as of October 2020	18
<b>Figure 3.</b> Afghanistan's population pyramid	19
<b>Figure 4.</b> Population pyramid of Afghanistan's population with a disability	20
<b>Figure 5.</b> Disability rate by age group	21
<b>Figure 6.</b> Age distribution among urban, rural and Kuchi populations	22
<b>Figure 7.</b> Distribution of household size (excluding non-members)	23
<b>Figure 8.</b> Age of female household heads	24
<b>Figure 9.</b> Distribution of number of children under 14 years per household	25
<b>Figure 10.</b> Total number of children and adolescents of different age groups living in different household types	26
<b>Figure 11.</b> Age and sex of household members aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus	28
<b>Figure 12.</b> Main relationships to the head of household by age of individuals aged 14 years or older who are not part of the household nucleus	28
<b>Figure 13.</b> Relationship of males aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus to the household head	28
<b>Figure 14.</b> Relationship of females aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus to the household head	29
<b>Figure 15.</b> Marital status of males aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus	29
<b>Figure 16.</b> Marital status of females aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus	29
<b>Figure 17.</b> Activity status of male household members aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus	30
<b>Figure 18.</b> Activity status of female household members aged 14 years or older who are not part of the household nucleus	30
<b>Figure 19.</b> Number of elderly people in different types of households	31
<b>Figure 20.</b> Relationship of elderly household members to the household head	31
<b>Figure 21.</b> Activity status by age	38

<b>Figure 22.</b> Type of (main) work among people living above and below the poverty line	38
<b>Figure 23.</b> Proportion of women and girls among population aged 14 years or older who have completed each education level	42
<b>Figure 24.</b> Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban areas	43
<b>Figure 25.</b> Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in rural areas	44
<b>Figure 26.</b> Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in Kuchi areas	44
<b>Figure 27.</b> Literacy by age	44
<b>Figure 28.</b> Literacy rates among children aged 10–17 years living above and below the national poverty line, by sex	45
<b>Figure 29.</b> Percentage of households living below and above the national PL that receive alternative sources of income	50
<b>Figure 30.</b> Population distribution by province (map based on Table 38)	59

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1.</b> Projected population of Afghanistan by 2030 (millions)	19
<b>Table 2.</b> Number of children and adolescents by age group according to the Afghan education system and labour legislation	20
<b>Table 3.</b> Disability status of the total population	20
<b>Table 4.</b> Number of households by type	23
<b>Table 5.</b> Types of households in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	24
<b>Table 6.</b> Marital status of female heads of households	24
<b>Table 7.</b> Households with children under 14 years in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	25
<b>Table 8.</b> Types of households with children under 14 years	26
<b>Table 9.</b> Percentage of households that live with children of different age groups	26
<b>Table 10.</b> Households that include female and male adolescents of different age groups	27

<b>Table 11.</b> Mean number of children and adolescents of different age groups in households in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	27
<b>Table 12.</b> Total number of children and adolescents of different age groups who live in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	27
<b>Table 13.</b> Elderly people in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	31
<b>Table 14.</b> Dependency ratios in Afghanistan (based on households)	32
<b>Table 15.</b> Mean household dependency ratios	32
<b>Table 16.</b> Dependency ratios in urban, rural and Kuchi areas (based on households)	32
<b>Table 17.</b> Population living above and below the national poverty line	33
<b>Table 18.</b> Population living above and below the poverty line in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	33
<b>Table 19.</b> Dependency ratios among poor and non-poor populations	34
<b>Table 20.</b> Activity status by sex	37
<b>Table 21.</b> Activity status among people living above and below the national poverty line	37
<b>Table 22.</b> Activity status in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	37
<b>Table 23.</b> Activity status among the elderly population	38
<b>Table 24.</b> Poverty rates by type of work	39
<b>Table 25.</b> Type of work by sex	39
<b>Table 26.</b> Type of work of urban, rural and Kuchi populations	40
<b>Table 27.</b> Individuals living above and below the poverty line engaged in vulnerable employment	40
<b>Table 28.</b> Individuals engaged in vulnerable employment, by sex	40
<b>Table 29.</b> Individuals in urban, rural and Kuchi areas engaged in vulnerable employment	41
<b>Table 30.</b> Literacy among individuals aged 14 years or older, by sex	42
<b>Table 31.</b> Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older, by sex	42
<b>Table 32.</b> Literacy among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	43

<b>Table 33.</b> Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban, rural and Kuchi areas	43
<b>Table 34.</b> Percentage of non-poor and poor individuals who experienced events in the past 12 months that strongly and negatively impacted them	47
<b>Table 35.</b> Shock types experienced by individuals in the 12 months preceding the IE&LF 2020	48
<b>Table 36.</b> Coping mechanisms used by households to cope with shocks	49
<b>Table 37.</b> Households' top priorities for government action	52
<b>Table 38.</b> Distribution of Afghanistan's population by province	58
<b>Table 39.</b> Population by province, disaggregated by sex	59
<b>Table 40.</b> Urban, rural and Kuchi populations, by province	60

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This needs assessment of Afghanistan has the goal of understanding how the country's demographic context, household characteristics and poverty are linked to vulnerability. Aware that more research must be done to establish causal relationships between these factors, this study suggests a direction in which to look further to understand the determinants of vulnerability in the country. As such, this policy-oriented research piece is aimed at making visible the social challenges that can be addressed by national policy actors. It builds on the data gathered by the most recent Income and Expenditure & Labour Force Surveys (IE&LF 2020), one of the most comprehensive efforts to gather data necessary for assessing vulnerability in the country. Using these data, it identifies some of the groups that seem to be particularly vulnerable.

Note that the development of this study began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and its finalisation precedes the Taliban takeover of 15 August 2021. The vulnerabilities described here, therefore, are a snapshot of Afghanistan in early 2020. This study may still serve as a reference to provide policymakers with information and tools for the restoration and improvement of Afghans' living standards. Nevertheless, readers must keep in mind that the country's context is changing rapidly.

This paper begins by explaining the needs assessment methodology and its limitations, followed by an outline of Afghanistan's demographic context, a description of household structures, and a vulnerability assessment. Building on these findings, the study discusses the factors potentially linked to vulnerabilities and Afghanistan's demographic context.

## 1.1 Methodology

To identify the most vulnerable populations and potential determinants of vulnerability, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) has used the IE&LF 2020 to analyse demographic and socio-economic data. This is the seventh in a series of surveys on Afghanistan's development conditions and was conducted by the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) of Afghanistan. It is the first survey conducted by the NSIA through digital technology instead of paper-based methods. Targeted at policymakers and researchers working with Afghanistan, the IE&LF 2020 contains data from 18,344 households (including 136,848 individuals) between October 2019 and September 2020. This sample was designed to represent the national and provincial populations, as well as the Kuchi (nomadic) communities. With data collected over all 12 months of the year, it attempts to include seasonal variations of development indicators. This needs assessment builds on data on Afghanistan's demographic profile, household structure, poverty, employment and education from this survey (NSIA 2021a).

To simplify the analysis while tailoring it to the Afghan context, the following groups of people and concepts were defined, taking national legislation, academic evidence and United Nations standards into account. These definitions were used throughout the study:

- **Children:** Afghanistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as someone below the age of 18 years. Poverty and deprivation at different stages of childhood can have consequences for individuals' quality of life and socio-economic status that last throughout their entire life (Chan et al. 2017; Daelmans et al. 2017; Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). This group was split into overlapping subgroups based on evidence regarding child development, and Afghanistan's school system and labour legislation prior to August 2021. Each subgroup faces vulnerabilities due to the development stage it finds itself in and relationships it has with the education system and labour market (Kuruville et al. 2018; Ministry of Education 2016; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018).
- **Children under 3 years:** The evidence on child development suggests that major stages of brain development occur before the age of 3 years. Further, malnutrition, which is associated with poverty

and low education, has long-lasting consequences for a person's life if it occurs during this period. As such, evidence suggests that policy interventions addressing children of this age may have impacts that last into adulthood (Chan et al. 2017; Daelmans et al. 2017; Machel 2017; UNICEF 2017).

- **Children below school age (0–5 years):** Children below school age are mostly outside the education system, so they are often not reached by policies through schools. Given that the compulsory school age in Afghanistan is 6 years, this group has been defined as children from birth to just before their sixth birthday (Ministry of Education 2016). Note that children may start school at later than 6 years in Afghanistan.
- **Children of school age (6–17 years):** This age group was defined based on the official school age and the number of grades. As this needs assessment will focus on children in general education from grades 1 to 12, this is the resulting age interval. Note that, prior to August 2021, children could also attend other types of schools, including Islamic schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and other literacy courses (Ministry of Education 2016; Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz 2016).
- **Children of school age below the minimum age of employment (6–13 years):** According to Afghan labour legislation before August 2021, the earliest age at which an individual could work was 14 years. At this age, adolescents may start working as trainees or apprentices (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). Further, labour data from the IE&LF are not available for younger age groups. The age group from 6 to 13 years is relevant because it is the age at which children could be expected to attend school, as they fall within the compulsory school age but are too young to be legally employed. Work at this age would be considered illegal child labour under the national legislation (ibid.).
- **Children of school age above the minimum age of employment (14–17 years):** This category implies that adolescents may either drop out of school to work or not join the labour force to continue their education. It, therefore, points to vulnerabilities linked to both educational attainment and employment (Ministry of Education 2016; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). Note that labour data for individuals based on the IE&LF begin at the age of 14 years. Further, the IPC-IG and UNICEF respect the national labour legislation while opposing any form of child labour.
- **Elderly people (55 years or older):** According to the IE&LF 2020 data, only around 6 per cent of Afghanistan's population are above 55 years old. Further, Afghans' average life expectancy at birth as of 2019 was 64.8 years (World Bank 2019). If defining 'old' as being 65 years old or older, elderly people would only make up less than 3 per cent of the country's population. Additionally, as Annex 1 illustrates, while, prior to August 2021, the retirement age for most workers was 65 years, civil servants could appeal for retirement at the age of 55, and some military officers at 52 (Ministry of Justice 2010a; 2009). As the latter group was believed to be quite small, as it only included low-ranked officers, *Bridmalan/Satanmanan* and youth officers, the age of 55 seemed more fitting during our arbitration of the age threshold to define old age (Ministry of Justice 2010a). It should be noted that our decision here does not necessarily imply all retirement schemes should consider 55 as the minimum age for retirement. Rather, our choice serves the purpose of setting a benchmark for us to calculate dependency ratios for the country.
- **Working-age population (14–54 years):** The minimum age threshold for this group lies at 14 because this is the minimum age for work in Afghanistan (International Labour Office 2016; Government of the Islamic

Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018).<sup>1</sup> As noted above, the authors discourage any form of child labour but highlight the importance of further analysing it. On the other hand, while setting the upper limit for this category, we chose to apply our definition of elderly people outlined above. We acknowledge that statutory retirement is set at the age of 65 for most workers eligible for old-age pensions (Ministry of Justice 2010a; 2009). The reason for this choice is that this age category will be used to calculate dependency ratios based on age and disability, rather than on economic activity, as is further explained below.

- **Dependents:** This group has been defined based on age and disability, not on labour force participation. As such, dependents have been understood as those younger than 14 years of age, due to the particular vulnerabilities of children outlined above and the illegality of child labour below this age (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). Individuals who are 55 years old or older have also been classified as dependents because that is the age threshold for old age defined above. People with disabilities (PwD), even when they are between 14 and 54 years old, have also been added to this category. Nevertheless, there are people in all of these groups who are actively part of the labour force. Women and girls between the ages of 14 and 54 have not been included in this category, even though a large proportion of them do not actively participate in the labour force.
- **Dependency ratios:** Based on these definitions of dependents, the following dependency ratios have been calculated using IE&LF 2020 data. All ratios below were calculated using the formula , hence the number of dependents per non-dependents:
  - **Age-based dependency ratio:** This is the ratio of children below the working age (0–13) and elderly people (55 and older) to working-age individuals (14–54). Disability and sex are disregarded.
  - **Youth dependency ratio:** Here, only the ratio of children below the working age (0–13) to working-age individuals (14–54) was calculated.
  - **Old-age dependency ratio:** The ratio of elderly people (55 or older) to working-age individuals (14–54).
  - **Disability-based dependency ratio:** This is the ratio of all PwD (of all ages) to all people without a disability, including children and elderly people. The assumption here is that those who cannot perform certain activities due to a disability can depend on those who can, regardless of age and sex.
  - **Age and disability-based dependency ratio:** Here, dependents include all children (0–13), elderly people (55 or older) and PwD (including those aged 14–54). The ratio is calculated between the sum of these groups and working-age individuals without a disability (14–54). Again, sex is disregarded.
- **Household types:** To better grasp Afghanistan’s different household structures, this needs assessment uses the following household categories. Note that, here, all households may include non-members, as some individuals labelled as non-members in the microdata may actually have been wrongly designated as such.

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1. We would like to point out that our definition of the working-age population, especially regarding the lower age limit, is not a normative one, but, rather, is taken from international standards. Specifically, the International Labour Organization defines the working-age population as “the population above the legal working age [...] with variation from country to country based on national law and practices” (International Labour Organization 2016, 51). A common international minimum age to engage in economic activity is 15. However, in the Afghan context, the law prior to August 2021 permitted work from the age of 14, hence determining the definition used in our needs assessment (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018).

- **Couple** households include solely married couples without children.
  - **Nuclear** households comprise couples with their children.
  - **Extended** households include, in addition to the nucleus, other relatives of the household head, such as parents, siblings and in-laws or children who are not of the household head.
  - **Single-female** households are not to be mistaken for female-headed households. While, by definition, any of the other household types may have a female head, this household type comprises a single female head with children.
  - **Other** households are those that do not fit any of the above-mentioned categories.
- **Poverty:** The consumption-based poverty line (PL) used in this report is the same as used by the NSIA (2021a), to maintain coherence with the national poverty analysis methodology and to respect Afghanistan's approach to poverty assessment prior to August 2021. For this, the IPC-IG relied on a separate database with the poverty dummy variable sent along with the remaining IE&LF 2020 microdata.
  - **Vulnerable workers:** This category was used to classify jobs with poor working conditions and a lack of stability as vulnerable. The following employment was classified as such: day labour, self-employment without paid employees, and unpaid family work. Salaried work in the private sector, salaried work in the public sector, and self-employment with paid employees, on the other hand, were not classified as vulnerable. Note that the IE&LF 2020 dataset does not include a variable for vulnerable or informal employment. Here, a definition of vulnerable employment was created using the type of work variables with the above-listed categories. However, self-employed workers with paid employees who are in the informal sector would be excluded from an analysis of informality based on vulnerable employment as a proxy for informality. Additionally, other elements of work, such as overqualification, were not considered here when creating the variable to denote vulnerable workers (compare with NSIA 2021b).
  - **Social protection:** While this study focuses primarily on the vulnerabilities of the Afghan population, Sections 5 and 6 also consider whether this population relies on social protection to cope with shocks (Section 5) or to ameliorate and overcome their vulnerabilities (Section 6). The working definition of social protection used throughout this study employs a social policy approach to social protection, in which it is defined as a set of programmes that protect individuals from contingencies throughout the life cycle and alleviate deprivation. As such, social protection here comprises social insurance, social assistance and labour market pillars (Barrientos 2010).
    - **Social insurance** is the contributory pillar of social protection, including programmes in which workers are protected from contingencies that may negatively affect their ability to sustain themselves, by regularly paying parts of their salaries so that they can later receive pensions. Typical social insurance programmes include old-age pensions and health insurance (ibid.).
    - On the other hand, the **social assistance** pillar is one where individuals do not have to contribute to receive benefits. Instead, tax or donor-financed social assistance programmes provide benefits to individuals with the goal of reducing and preventing deprivation. Such programmes include school feeding programmes, conditional cash transfers to families with children, and many more (ibid.).



- Finally, **labour market** programmes are the third pillar of social protection. These programmes typically offer income to individuals when they are unable to work, but they also support employment creation and access to jobs so that these individuals may enter the labour force. Such programmes include cash-for-work programmes and other initiatives such as training (ibid.).

Further, this needs assessment compares the findings of the IE&LF 2020 to additional studies concerned with assessing the demographic context of and vulnerability in Afghanistan:

- **Food insecurity:** It was not possible for IPC-IG researchers to replicate the food insecurity indicators used by the NSIA, due to a lack of information in the IE&LF report. Therefore, to include a discussion on this topic, secondary data were used. For this, the team conducted desk research, in which the COVID-19 pandemic, drought and Taliban takeover were considered.
- **Multidimensional poverty in the IE&LF dataset:** We acknowledge that poverty does not only manifest itself in low consumption or income levels but also in deprivations of essential needs (Alkire and Foster 2011). To show that consumption-based poverty (based on the national PL) correlates with more sophisticated measures such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), we used the IE&LF data to analyse some essential deprivations highlighted in the literature (see Alkire and Jahan 2018) and their prevalence among the Afghan population<sup>2</sup> We have chosen the MPI as an orientation for the types of multidimensional poverty indicators we could use to show these correlations, because the NSIA published an extensive report on multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in 2019. Specifically, we look at multidimensional poverty along the following education and standard of living indicators without attempting to replicate the entire MPI:
  - households' access to flush toilets;
  - households' source of drinking water;
  - households' source of electricity;
  - households' source of lighting;
  - type of fuel used by households for cooking;
  - households' ownership of the following assets: refrigerators, televisions, computers and private cars;
  - materials used for the floors, walls and roofs of households' dwellings;
  - literacy among individuals aged 14 and older; and
  - children aged 6–13 years who have ever attended school.

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2. Importantly, this exercise does not aim to be a comprehensive assessment of multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan, nor does it aim to measure poverty through a multidimensional index [see NSIA and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2019) for an in-depth analysis of multidimensional poverty in Afghanistan]. Rather, its aim is to look at some specific deprivations among the Afghani population that have been highlighted in the literature to complement our needs assessment. For reasons of consistency, we draw on the established definitions of a selection of deprivations proposed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (Alkire and Jahan 2018).

## 1.2 Limitations

The IE&LF and the above-mentioned methodology have limitations. First, due to security concerns in 2019 and 2020, fieldworkers conducting the survey faced difficulties or were impeded from accessing some areas of the country, leading to biases in the IE&LF 2020 sample.

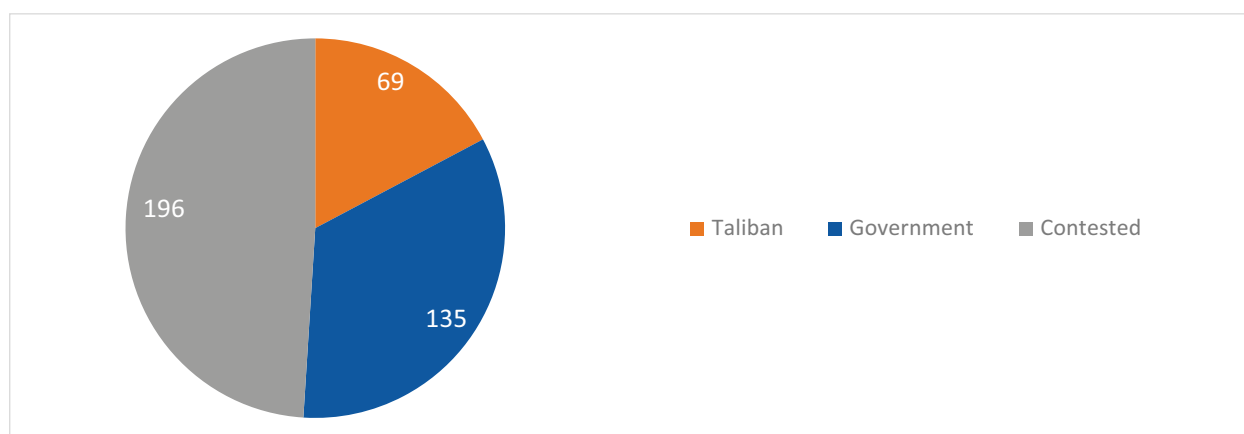
Further, there is a lack of women in the sample, which may be linked to social norms that may have kept interviewers from identifying certain women. The practice of *purdah*—a social norm that assigns women to private spaces and familial responsibilities that may result in their seclusion and isolation from strangers—is likely to have been the reason for this (Ritchie 2016). Similarly, not all children and infants may have been identified by interviewers. This may have been related to the seclusion of women, underreporting of births of female newborns and also high infant mortality (Rasooly et al. 2014; Ritchie 2016).

As the poverty dummy variable used for this needs assessment is based on the poverty methodology employed by the NSIA, the limitation of this methodology also applies here: it is a monetary measure that does not consider all dimensions of poverty (NSIA 2021b). To compensate for this, subsection 4.2 illustrates the relationship between poverty and multidimensional poverty indicators listed in the previous subsection (see NSIA and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative 2019). Finally, the dummy variable made available to the IPC-IG to identify poor households contained missing values. Therefore, when looking at the totals of poor and non-poor populations of a given group, there may be slightly fewer individuals than when looking at that same group without considering poverty.

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the implementation of the survey. Sars-Cov-2 reached Afghanistan about six months into IE&LF implementation, causing it to halt for a month. It was later continued, but the effects of the pandemic and social distancing measures on survey implementation and on the comparability of households' living conditions must be considered (NSIA 2021b). This latter point is further aggravated by the climate and security crises Afghanistan has been facing since the IE&LF 2020 data were published.

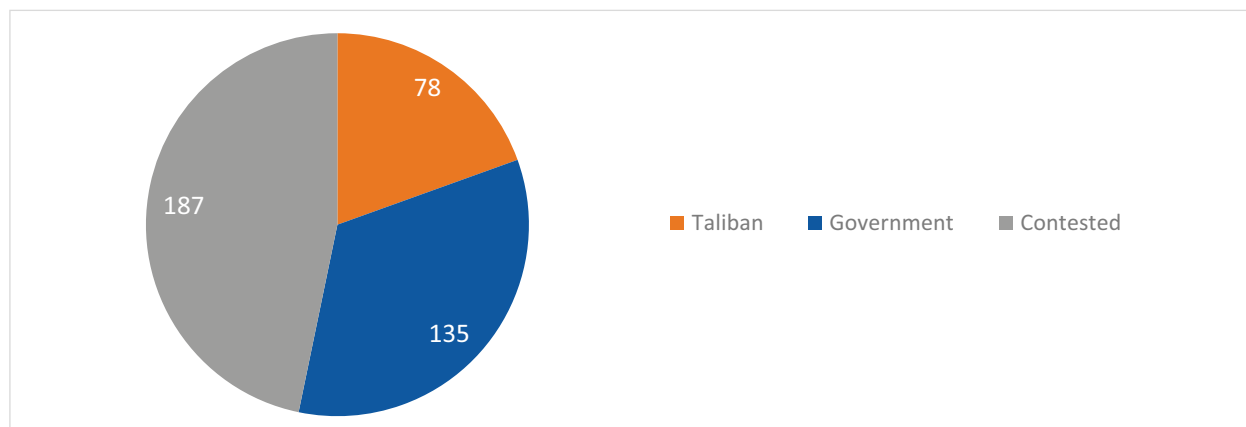
Having been gathered prior to the pandemic, the microdata available do not offer an overview of the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for the country. Further, the impacts of recent droughts and the Taliban takeover of August 2021 on vulnerability in the country are not captured through these data. Regarding the latter, it is still important to point out that, when the IE&LF was implemented, a large part of the country was already controlled by the Taliban (see Figures 1 and 2). To consider the impacts of those crises on Afghanistan's vulnerabilities, the IPC-IG has included some additional considerations about vulnerabilities in the country based on secondary data to alleviate this limitation.

**Figure 1. Occupied districts as of November 2019**



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Roggio (2021).

**Figure 2. Occupied districts as of October 2020**



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Roggio (2021).

Other limitations include the following.

- Due to social and cultural factors, the NSIA (2021b) points out that disability may be vastly underreported, resulting in disability rates lower than expected. Potentially because of this, the sample of PwD in the microdata was relatively small, so this study does not elaborate on in-depth analyses disaggregating this sample further into other groups (by province, for example), as inferences from such a small sample may be too imprecise.
- The data regarding shocks were only available at the household level. As such, while it is possible to expand the results to the individual level to identify how many individuals lived in households that experienced shocks as of 2020, it cannot be clearly stated that these individuals experienced the shocks. Certain household members may have moved into a household after the shock occurred or left before its onset, for example. Further, the data do not show individual coping strategies to deal with such shocks. Gendered responses to shocks or coping mechanisms mediated by age, employment status and other factors are, therefore, not included in the data used for this report.
- Around 5 per cent of surveyed households have missing data in at least one section due to issues with coordinating which household members were eligible for which survey section (NSIA 2021b).
- The sample of the Kuchi population was relatively small compared to urban and rural residents. This small sample size may limit the comparability of results between urban, rural and Kuchi households.
- This study does not dive deeper into an analysis of income quantiles, due to a high number of missing values in the available income microdata. Instead, it relies on an analysis of consumption-based poverty through the national PL.

## 2. POPULATION

Sections 2 and 3 analyse Afghanistan's demographic context, highlighting the high proportion of children in a young population living predominantly in rural areas. Based on the IE&LF 2020, it can be estimated that Afghanistan has a population of around 32.2 individuals.<sup>3</sup>

3. Although this needs assessment works with this population size, it is worth noting that the August–October 2020 Flowminder estimates suggest that Afghanistan had a population of around 40.4 million people at the end of 2020 (IPC-IG 2020a).

Using the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) medium projection variant,<sup>4</sup> the growth in Afghanistan's population by 2030 is projected in Table 1.

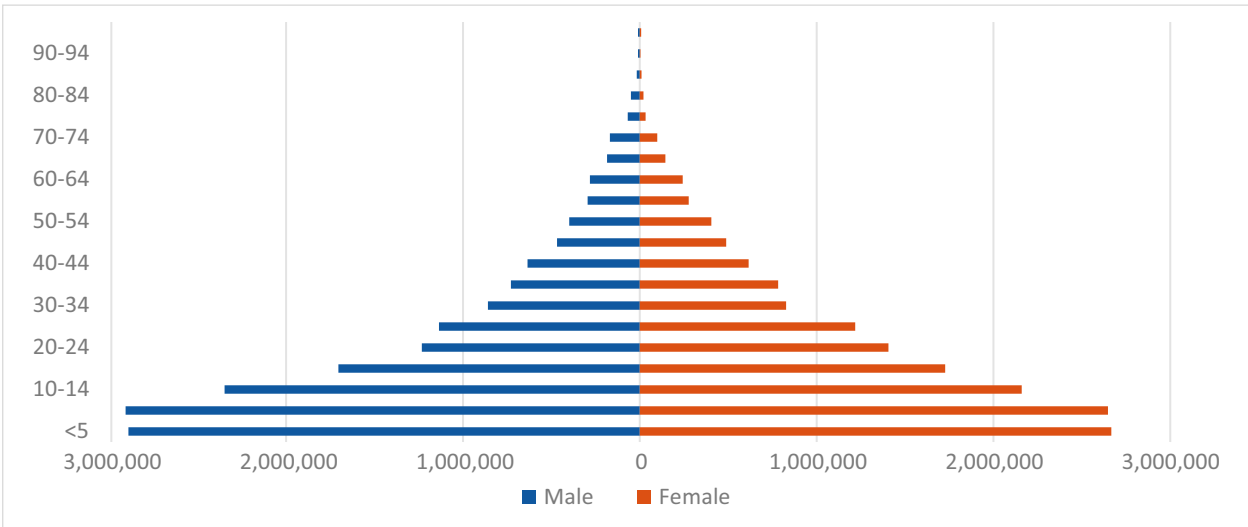
**Table 1. Projected population of Afghanistan by 2030 (millions)**

Total population	Male population	Female population
48.1	24.6	23.9

Source: UNDESA Population Division (2019a; 2019b; 2019c).

Further, Figure 3 illustrates how young the country's population is. The World Bank (2019) estimates an average life expectancy at birth of 64.8 years for people born in the country as of 2019, which seems to be reflected by this population pyramid. It is also evident that children and youth comprise a large part of the population.

**Figure 3. Afghanistan's population pyramid**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Note that, with an estimated population of 15.8 million females and 16.4 million males in September 2020, the survey data seem to suggest that Afghanistan's male population is larger than the female. However, these numbers must be interpreted with caution, as the practice of *purdah* explained above is likely to have excluded many women from the survey (Ritchie 2016). Many women and girls may have, therefore, been omitted from Table 1 and Figure 3.

### 2.1 Children

As illustrated in Figure 3, children and youth comprise a large segment of Afghanistan's population. Table 2 summarises the number of children and adolescents of different age groups in the country. Note that children and adolescents together make up more than half of the country's population. Further, more than 40 per cent of the national population are below the minimum age of employment of 14 years. Note that, as outlined in Section 1.2, there might be even more children in the country than those identified through the IE&LF 2020.

4. For UNDESA's population projections methodology, please refer to UNDESA Population Division (2019d).

**Table 2.** Number of children and adolescents by age group according to the Afghan education system and labour legislation

Group	Age	Number	Percentage of total population
Below compulsory school age	0–5	6,762,548	21.01%
Children under 3	0–2	3,100,397	9.63%
School age	6–17	10,901,669	33.88%
Below the legal age for work	6–13	8,181,090	25.42%
Above the legal age for work	14–17	2,720,579	8.45%
Total number of children and adolescents	0–17	17,664,217	54.89%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

## 2.2 People with disabilities

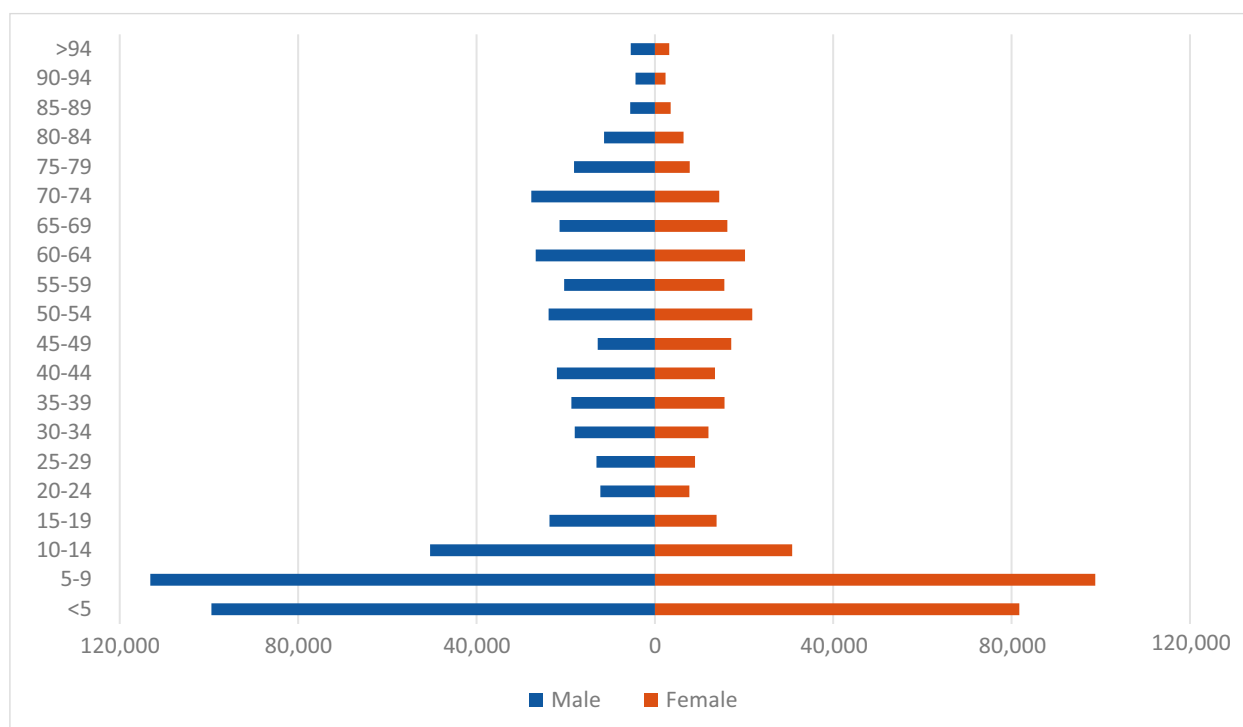
Afghanistan is home to a considerable population of PwD. Their proportion relative to people without disabilities is summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Disability status of the total population

Status	Population	Percentage
Without disabilities	30,147,939	96.9%
With disabilities	960,160	3.1%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

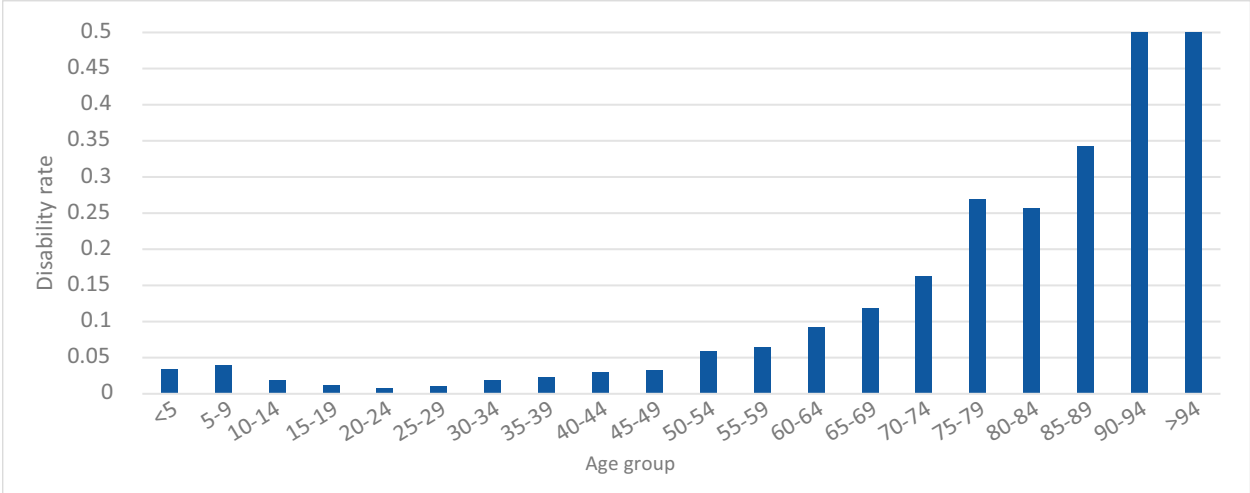
**Figure 4.** Population pyramid of Afghanistan's population with a disability



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As Figure 4 shows, in absolute numbers, most people reportedly living with a disability in Afghanistan are children—especially those under 10 years old. This points to non-age-related and thus preventable causes of disabilities. Analysing the disability rates per age group (Figure 5), it becomes apparent that older age groups have a greater share of PwD. Still, disability rates among children appear to be higher than among young adults. Note that this could be related to young adults not reporting disabilities, for social reasons, whereas disabilities among children are reported. However, this interpretation remains speculative with the data available. Finally, Figure 4 seems to show more male than female PwD in the country, but the underrepresentation of women and girls in the survey must be considered.

**Figure 5. Disability rate by age group**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**2.3 Elderly people**

As illustrated by the population pyramid in Figure 3, Afghanistan’s population is rather young and does not include many elderly people. This relates to the country’s life expectancy at birth of 64.8 years (World Bank 2019). While the age pyramid implies that there are more elderly males than females in Afghanistan, it is likely that many older women were omitted from the sample due to *purdah* (Ritchie 2016).

**2.4 Population by province**

As Figure 30 in Annex 2 illustrates, by far the most populous province in Afghanistan is Kabul, followed by Herat and Nangarhar. These three provinces alone are inhabited by more than a quarter of the national population.

The only province that is predominantly urban is Kabul, with 82.2 per cent of its population residing in urban areas. In terms of urbanisation, it is followed by Balkh (37.7 per cent) and Kandahar (37 per cent). All other provinces have predominantly rural residents, with Daykundi and Nooristan having no report of any urban or Kuchi residents. The Kuchi population, although present in many provinces, shows its highest concentration in the three eastern provinces of Logar (16.1 per cent of the Kuchi population), Nangahar (14.4 per cent) and Kabul (13.7 per cent). Note that, as of 2015, in addition to having a large population, a large proportion of Kabul’s residents were internally displaced persons. In that year, 40 per cent of internally displaced persons were among the urban poor in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kandahar (Kumar and Fernandez 2016).

Annex 2 provides further details about the provinces’ population sizes, sex ratios and urbanisation.

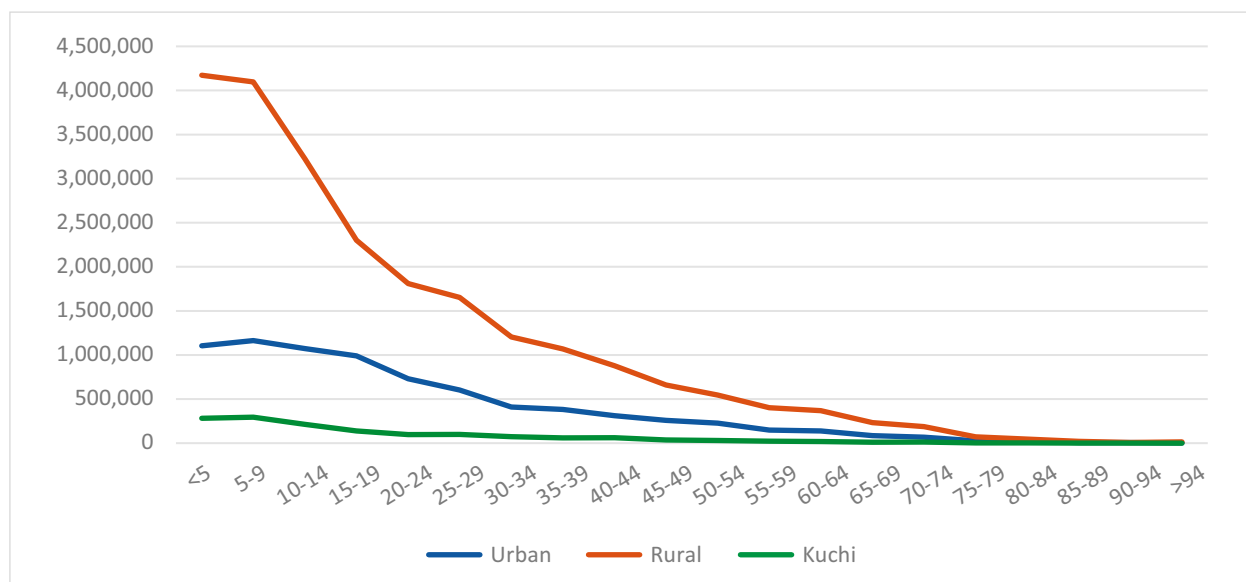
## 2.5 Urban, rural and Kuchi populations

As stated above, the majority of Afghanistan's population live in rural areas, with only 24.1 per cent of people living in urban<sup>5</sup> areas, and 4.54 per cent being Kuchi (nomadic). Due to the higher representation of men than women in the IE&LF sample, the sex ratio in urban, rural and Kuchi areas always points to a larger male than female population. However, the difference is lowest in urban areas and largest among the Kuchi population. This may imply that *pardah* is not practised as much in urban areas, and more so among the Kuchi population (see Ritchie 2016). Note that more research is necessary to confirm this. Finally, as Figure 6 shows, the Kuchi population is comparatively the youngest in Afghanistan, with the urban population being the oldest.

This may imply higher fertility and mortality rates and worse health conditions among the Kuchi population, and the opposite in urban areas. Evidence comparing rural and urban populations seems to support this. In 2010, rural areas had a maternal mortality ratio four times as large as that of urban areas, keeping underreported deaths in mind. Total fertility rates were also higher among rural women than urban (Rasooly et al. 2014). This seems linked to the greater access to and usage of health facilities in urban areas (Carvalho et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2016; Naim et al. 2015). Further evidence also suggests that women and children are less likely to be well nourished in rural areas, although other factors also influence this relationship (Akseer et al. 2018). However, note that the sample of the Kuchi population is comparatively smaller—potentially too small to draw too many conclusions from it.

Moreover, one could speculate whether the findings in Figure 6 are also linked to labour migration from Kuchi and rural areas to cities. As Kumar and Fernandez (2016) have found, conflict and food insecurity have contributed to urbanisation in Afghanistan. While the authors state that literature on Afghanistan is scarce, it is speculated that the presence of aid in urban areas and perceptions of safety in cities (mainly Kabul) and of more economic opportunity prior to August 2021 as well as the so-called day labour market for construction work in urban centres may have attracted rural migration (Kumar and Fernandez 2016).

**Figure 6. Age distribution among urban, rural and Kuchi populations**



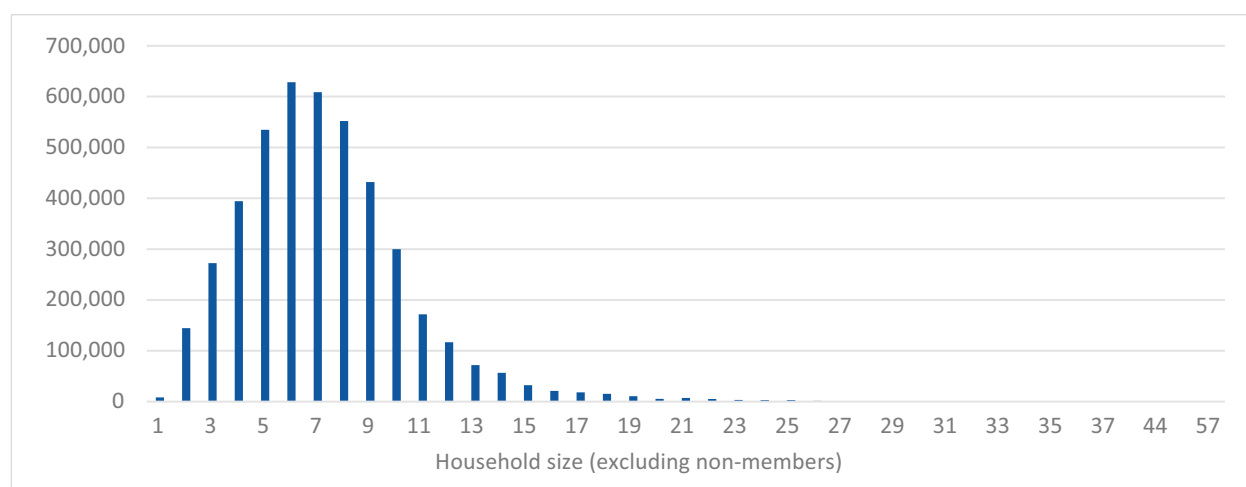
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

5. Note that this may be an overestimate, as people in remote rural or Kuchi areas might be harder to reach for the survey.

### 3. HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

Based on the IE&LF 2020, it could be estimated that there were 4.4 million households in Afghanistan in 2020, with a mean size of 7.3 people. Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of household size in Afghanistan. In addition to the variation in household size at national level, there are disparities between urban, rural and Kuchi populations. The 1.1 million urban households are the smallest, with a mean size of 7 members, compared to the 3.1 million rural households with a mean size of 7.3 members. The approximately 194,000 Kuchi households have a mean size of 7.5 members. Note that the underreporting of women and (especially young) children means that households may be larger, especially those belonging to groups that are prone to underreporting. The following subsection elaborates on Afghanistan’s different types of households and their composition.

**Figure 7. Distribution of household size (excluding non-members)**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

#### 3.1 Household types

Most households in Afghanistan are nuclear, making up slightly more than half of all households, followed by extended households. While the vast majority of these households are headed by men, a few female-headed households have been identified, which will be discussed further below. Table 4 summarises the household types identified.

**Table 4. Number of households by type**

Type of household	Number	Percentage
Couple	120,671	3
Nuclear	2,701,896	61
Extended	1,354,828	31
Single-female	58,036	1
Other	190,006	4

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

The national distribution of household types is similar in urban, rural and Kuchi areas, with slight disparities between the three, as shown in Table 5.



**Table 5. Types of households in urban, rural and Kuchi areas**

Type	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Couple	2.3%	2.9%	3.2%
Nuclear	62.7%	60.1%	67.2%
Extended	27.5%	31.9%	27.4%
Single-female	1.9%	1.2%	0.2%
Other	5.6%	4.0%	2.1%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

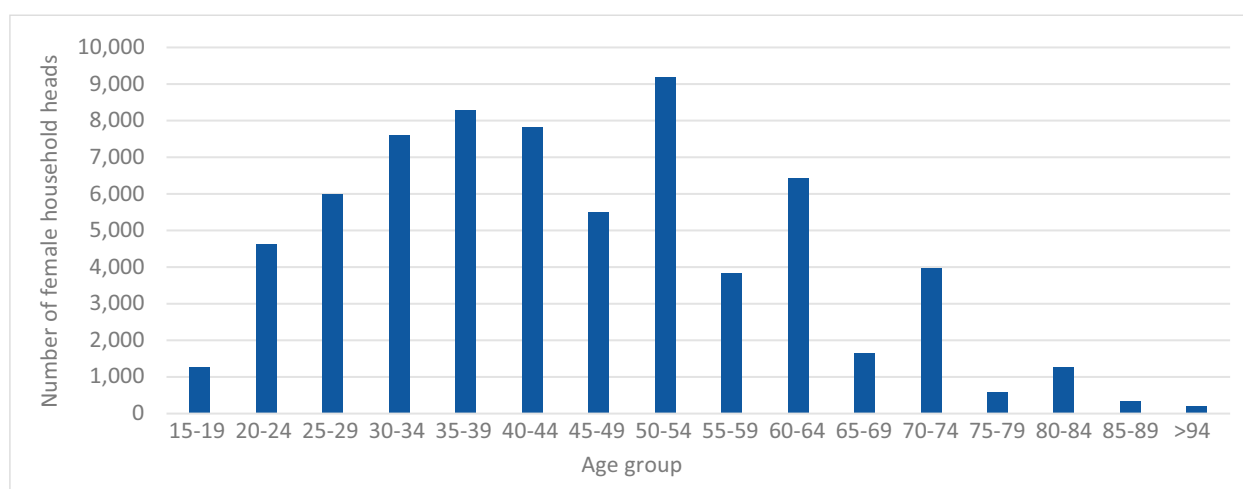
Although the vast majority of household heads do not have a disability, 4.6 per cent of Afghanistan's households are headed by a person with a disability. Note that this is a higher proportion than in the general population.

Generally, no household head has more than four wives, with most polygamous household nuclei including two wives. The mean age difference between household heads and their spouses is 6.3 years but varies between monogamous and polygamous arrangements.

**Table 6. Marital status of female heads of households**

Marital status	Number	Percentage
Married	13,567	19.77
Widowed	52,887	77.08
Divorced/separated	869	1.27
Never married, not engaged	1,292	1.88

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 8. Age of female household heads**

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

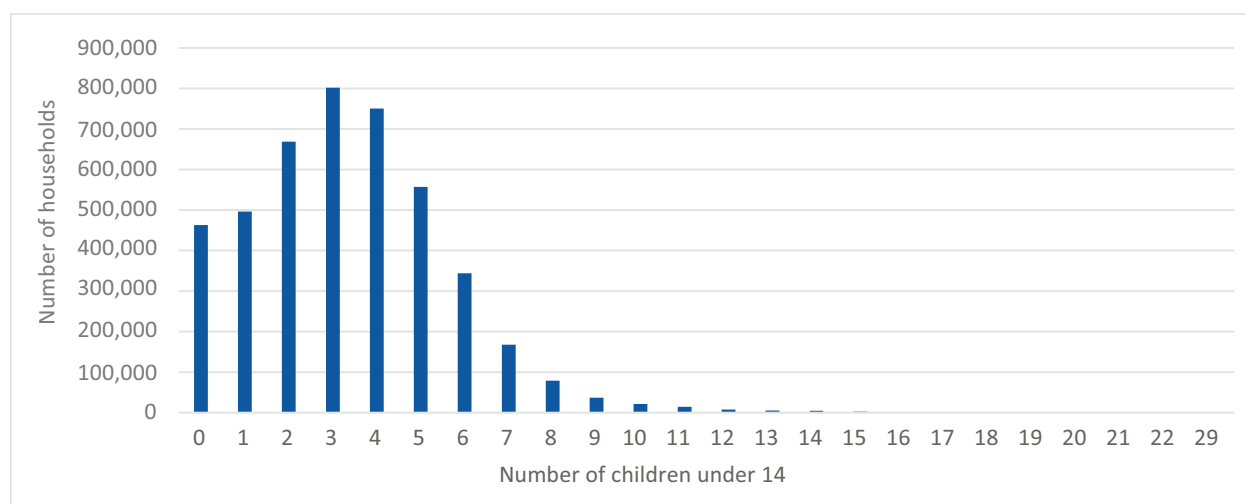
Only 68,615 households (1.6 per cent) are headed by women, most of whom are widows (see Table 6). Most live in rural areas, with only 366 female-headed households having been identified among the Kuchi population. A mean number of 2.1 children live in female-headed households, compared to 3.4 children in male-headed households.

Note, however, that around 1 per cent of male-headed households were headed by adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 years. In practice, one might speculate that, in such households, women may take on roles of household heads, meaning that female-headed households may be underreported. Figure 8 illustrates the age of female household heads.

### 3.2 Children in households

The mean number of children under 14 years per household is 3.4. Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of children under 14 within the country's households in more detail.

**Figure 9.** Distribution of number of children under 14 years per household



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

The likelihood of having children and the number of children per household varies between urban, rural and Kuchi populations, and household types. Table 7 shows the number of urban, rural and Kuchi households with and without children. Note that among all three subpopulations, the vast majority of households include at least one child under the age of 14, with urban households being more likely to be childless, and Kuchi households the least likely. The mean number of children under 14 per household is also the lowest among urban households (2.8). Rural households have a much greater mean number of children (3.5), but the number is highest among the Kuchi population (3.9) (see Rasooly et al. 2014).

**Table 7.** Households with children under 14 years in urban, rural and Kuchi areas

	No		Yes	
Urban	155,469	14%	951,031	86%
Rural	292,450	9%	2,832,507	91%
Kuchi	15,006	8%	178,974	92%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Among nuclear, extended and single-female households, the vast majority include children under the age of 14, as summarised in Table 8. Only couple and other households show a different pattern from the rest, with 100 per cent of couples (by definition) and 68 per cent of other households being childless.

**Table 8. Types of households with children under 14 years**

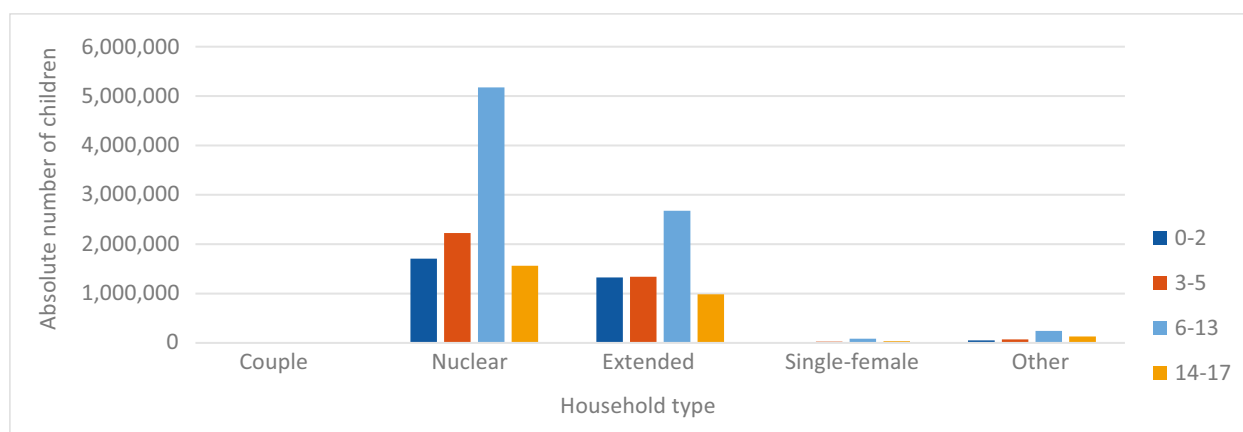
Household type	No	Yes
Couple	100.0%	0.0%
Nuclear	0.0%	100.0%
Extended	5.4%	94.6%
Single-female	0.0%	100.0%
Other	68.2%	31.9%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

The number of children varies substantially by household type. Couple households have—by definition—no children. On the other hand, nuclear households have the highest mean numbers of children (4.5), followed by extended households (4.1), single-female households (3.2) and other households (0.8).

Further visualising the prevalence of nuclear and extended households in the country, Figure 10 illustrates in what kinds of households most children and adolescents of different age groups live. Note that the age groups 0–2 and 3–5 denote children younger than school age, while 14–17 illustrates the number of adolescents above the minimum age for employment.

**Figure 10. Total number of children and adolescents of different age groups living in different household types**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Table 9 summarises the presence of children and adolescents of different age groups in households. Adolescents seem to be more likely to move out as they grow older. Note that adolescent girls may be underrepresented in the sample compared to boys.

**Table 9. Percentage of households that live with children of different age groups**

Age	No	Yes
Under 3	45.51%	54.49%
3–5	40.69%	59.31%
6–13	27.59%	72.41%
14–18	58.37%	41.63%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Keeping *purdah* practices in mind, the presence of adolescents in a household does not seem to be otherwise impacted by sex on a national level, as illustrated by Table 10.

**Table 10. Households that include female and male adolescents of different age groups**

	11–13 years old		14–18 years olds	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
No	75.4%	72.3%	74.8%	74.5%
Yes	24.6%	27.7%	25.2%	25.6%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Comparing urban, rural and Kuchi populations, there seems to be a similar pattern among households, with fewer children under 3 years old and adolescents, as summarised in Table 11. Urban households stand out because they have lower mean numbers of children and a higher prevalence of adolescents than rural and Kuchi households. This may imply that adolescents in urban areas might get married and create their own households later than their rural and Kuchi counterparts. However, as the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF (2018) note, while there is substantial geographical variation regarding marriage during adolescence, the difference is greater between provinces than between urban and rural areas.

Table 12 shows that most children and adolescents live in rural areas, regardless of age group, reflecting the pattern of the general population.

**Table 11. Mean number of children and adolescents of different age groups in households in urban, rural and Kuchi areas**

Age	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Under 3	0.6	0.7	0.8
3–5	0.6	0.9	1.0
6–13	1.6	1.9	2.1
14–18	0.7	0.6	0.6

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 12. Total number of children and adolescents of different age groups who live in urban, rural and Kuchi areas**

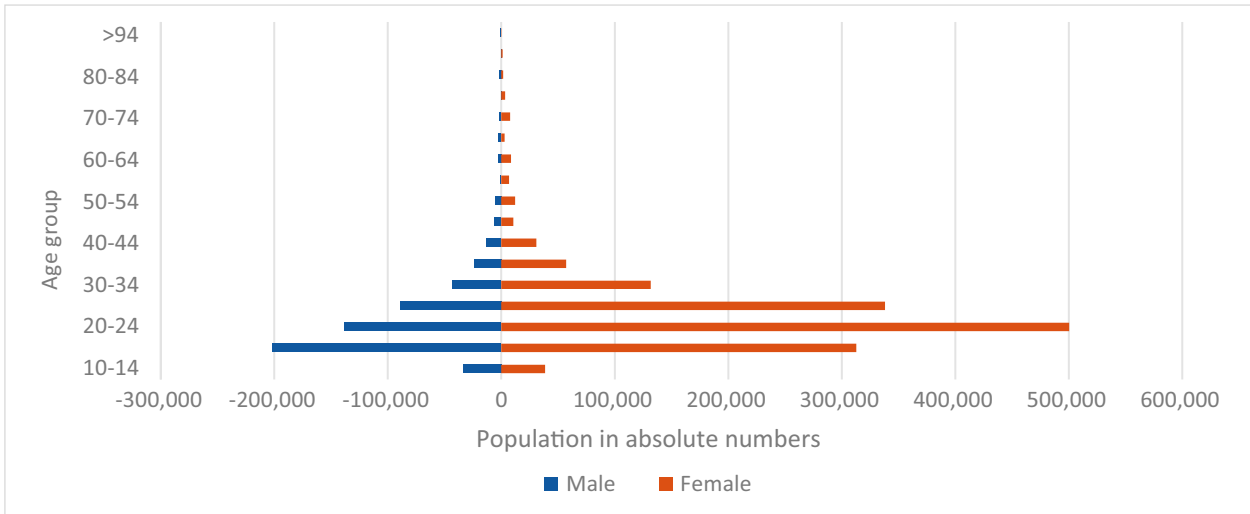
Age	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Under 3	639,684	2,301,503	159,210
3–5	710,175	2,761,290	190,686
6–13	1,818,091	5,955,641	407,358
14–18	745,850	1,858,707	116,022

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

### 3.3 Individuals aged 14 years or older in households

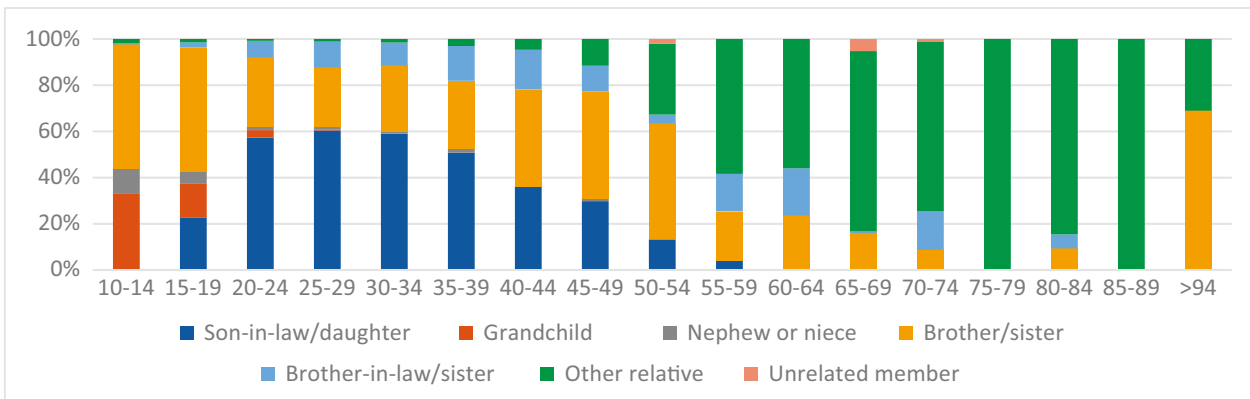
Certain household types include working-age individuals and elderly people who are not part of the household nucleus. These are all individuals aged 14 or older who are not parents, spouses or children of the household head or the head themselves. Generally, young women seem more likely than men to live in households in which they are not part of the nucleus, as illustrated by Figure 11. Figure 12 summarises the relationships of these individuals to household heads by age. Note that, as Figures 13 and 14 illustrate, these relationships vary between men and women.

**Figure 11.** Age and sex of household members aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus



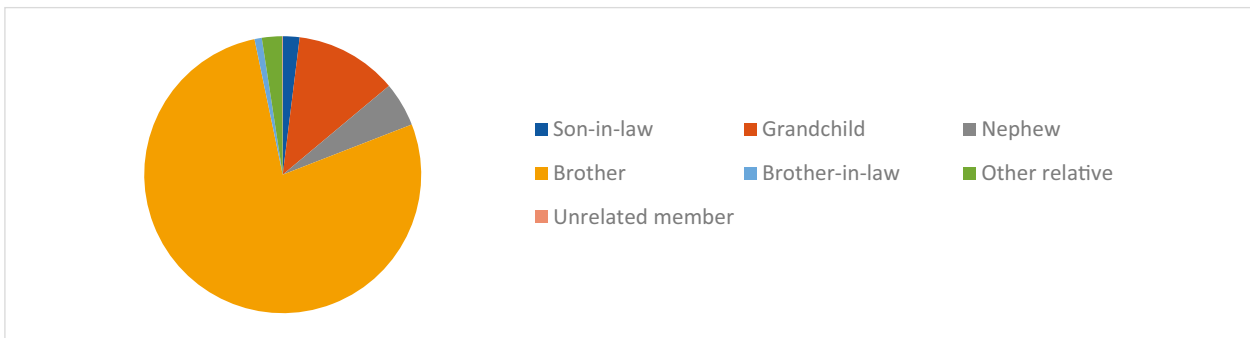
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 12.** Main relationships to the head of household by age of individuals aged 14 years or older who are not part of the household nucleus



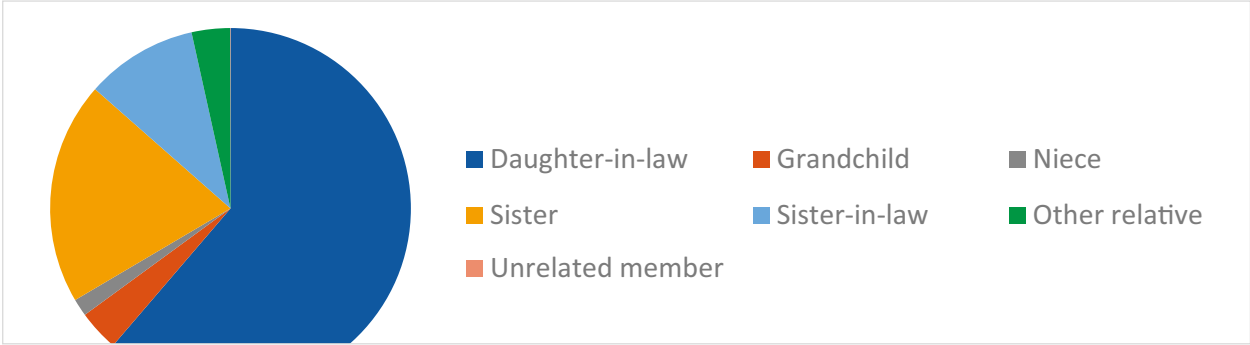
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 13.** Relationship of males aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus to the household head



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

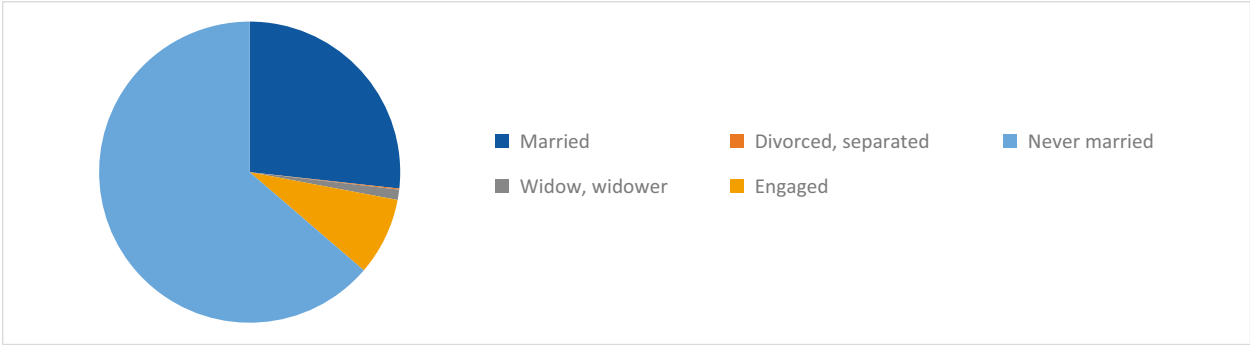
**Figure 14.** Relationship of females aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus to the household head



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

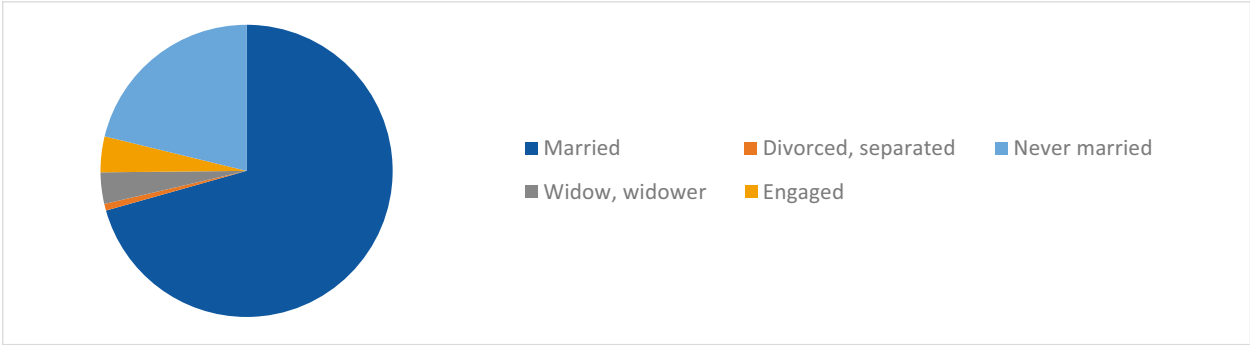
The figures above seem to imply that the most common reasons why these individuals live together are when siblings live together or when a woman marries into another household. Figures 15 and 16 show the marriage status of all individuals aged 14 years or older living in households in which they are not part of the nucleus. Women generally tend to be married. Linking the findings illustrated by Figures 15 and 16 to those described above, it seems like the IE&LF 2020 data suggest that women are more likely to leave their original households when they get married, while married men may either create their own households or have their wives move in with them in their original household.

**Figure 15.** Marital status of males aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

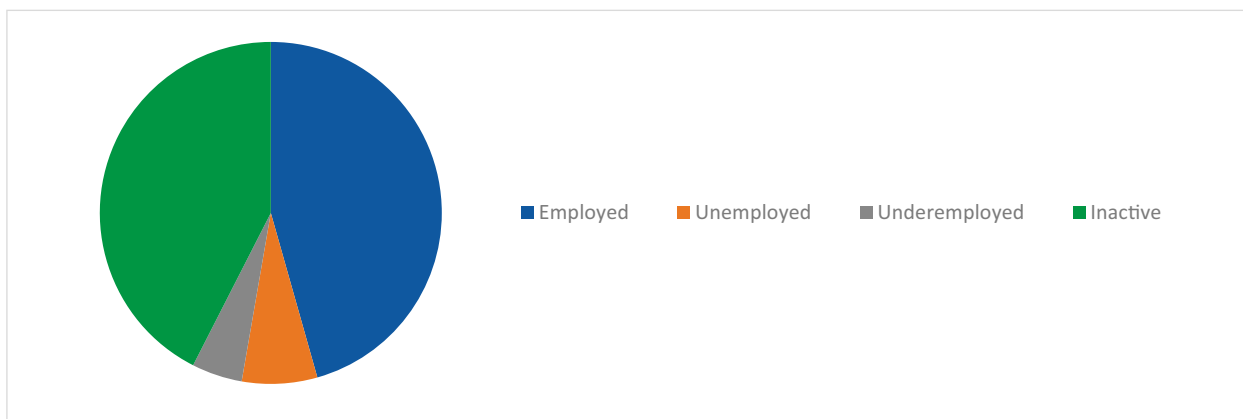
**Figure 16.** Marital status of females aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

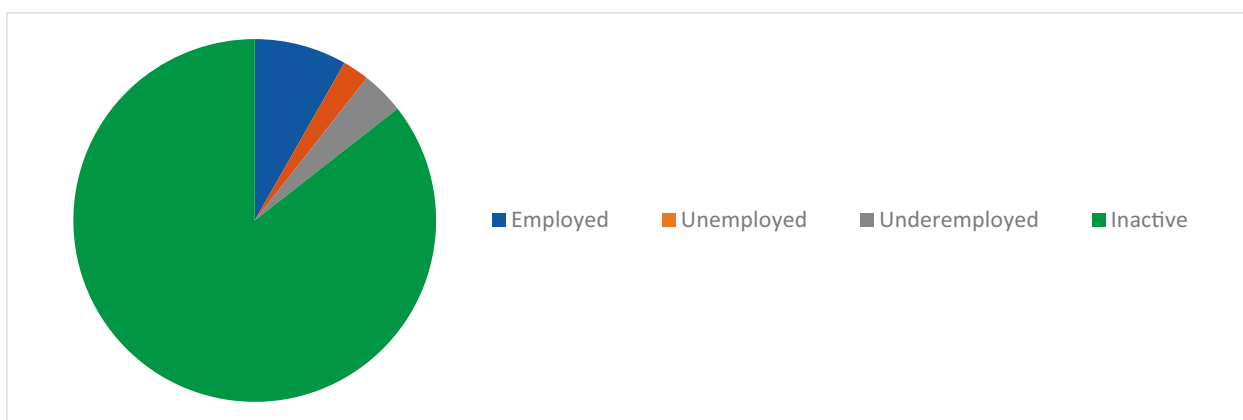
The activity status of those living in a household in which they are not part of the nucleus must also be considered. As Figures 17 and 18 illustrate, most males aged 14 years or older who are not part of the household nucleus are either employed or economically inactive, while women are mostly economically inactive.

**Figure 17.** Activity status of male household members aged 14 years or more who are not part of the household nucleus



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 18.** Activity status of female household members aged 14 years or older who are not part of the household nucleus



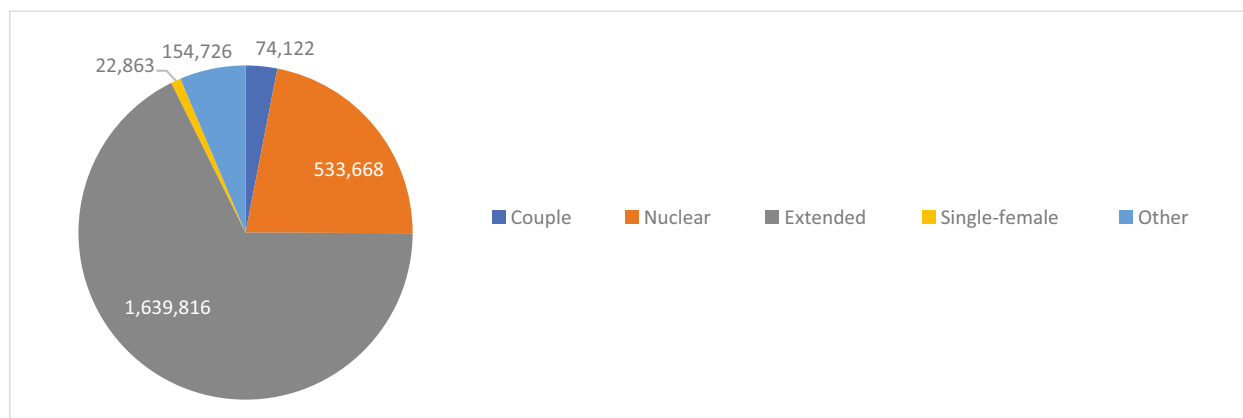
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

### 3.4 Elderly people in households

The mean number of elderly people per household in Afghanistan is 0.4. Keeping Afghanistan's young population in mind, 32 per cent of households include an elderly person. The types of households that include elderly people are couple households, in which 2.6 per cent of all elderly people live, nuclear households (23.8 per cent), extended households (66.9 per cent), single-female (0.9 per cent) and other households (5.8 per cent).

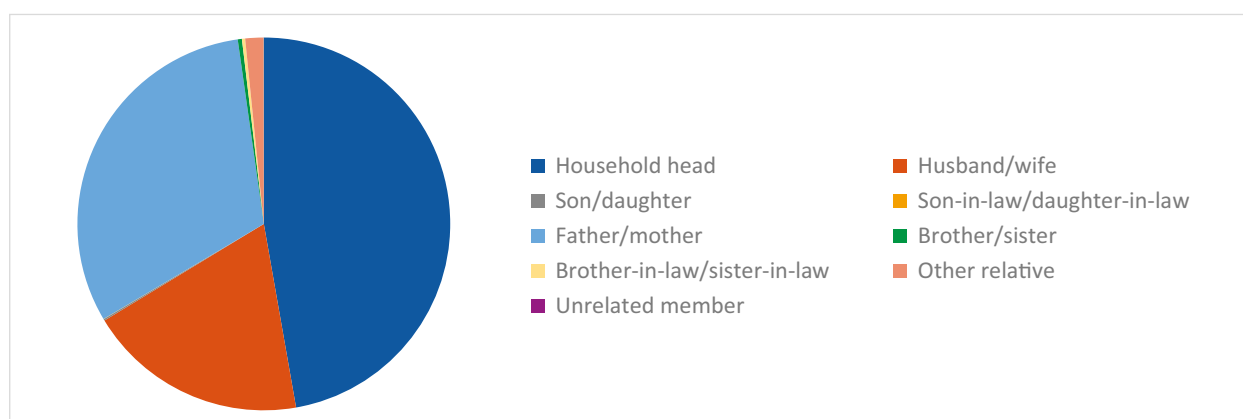
The position of the elderly people within their households varies considerably. Most frequently, they are the household head or the partner of the household head. Another frequent arrangement sees elderly parents living with their children as household heads.

**Figure 19.** Number of elderly people in different types of households



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 20.** Relationship of elderly household members to the household head



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Urban households are the most likely to include an elderly person (39 per cent), while Kuchi households are the least likely (28 per cent). In rural areas, 36 per cent of households include at least one elderly person. Table 13 shows the percentage of elderly people who live in urban, rural and Kuchi areas. Like the general population, most elderly people live in rural areas.

**Table 13.** Elderly people in urban, rural and Kuchi areas

	Number of elderly people	Percentage of elderly people in population	Percentage of households including an elderly person
Urban	504,682	26%	34%
Rural	1,349,516	70%	31%
Kuchi	71,370	4%	24%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Note that some of the households identified by the IE&LF 2020 comprise household members who are all 55 years old or older. Such elderly-only households make up just 4.7 per cent of the country's households.



### 3.5 People with disabilities in households

In Afghanistan, 13.6 per cent of all households include at least one person with a disability, with the mean number of household members with a disability being 0.2. As mentioned previously, PwD may also be household heads, with around 200,000 households being headed by a person with a disability, which is equivalent to 4.7 per cent of all households. While almost a third of households that include PwD are headed by them, household members with a disability also tend to be primarily the household head's spouse (10.3 per cent), child (48.9 per cent) or parent (9.7 per cent).

### 3.6 Dependency ratios

Based on the definitions explained in Section 1.1, five types of dependency ratios were calculated using IE&LF 2020 data. Note that activity status was not considered during the calculation of these ratios. Table 14 compiles the five types of dependency ratios at the national level.

**Table 14. Dependency ratios in Afghanistan (based on households)**

Age-based	1.10
Youth	0.98
Old age	0.13
Disability	0.01
Age and disability	1.17

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 15. Mean household dependency ratios**

Age-based	1.33
Youth	1.18
Old age	0.14
Disability	0.07
Age and disability	1.39

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Further, the mean dependency ratio per household has been calculated five times based on the different ratios above, summarised in Table 15.

Since rural and Kuchi populations are comparatively younger than their urban counterparts, dependency ratios that include young people tend to be higher among rural and Kuchi households than among urban households. However, as urban household are older, old-age and disability-based dependency ratios tend to be higher in urban areas than in rural and Kuchi areas, as summarised in Table 16. Nevertheless, note that the urban population is also relatively young, so the old-age and disability-based dependency ratios are also lower than age- and youth-based dependency ratios in urban areas.

**Table 16. Dependency ratios in urban, rural and Kuchi areas (based on households)**

	Age	Youth	Old age	Disability	Disability and age
Urban	1.14	0.99	0.15	0.15	1.22
Rural	1.38	1.24	0.14	0.05	1.44
Kuchi	1.53	1.40	0.13	0.00	1.57

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

## 4. VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

After analysing Afghanistan's demographic characteristics in the two previous sections, this section describes the main vulnerabilities faced by the Afghan population. As the COVID-19 pandemic, most recent droughts and the Taliban takeover of August 2021 are likely to have altered the vulnerability profile of the country, secondary data—when available—are also used in this section to comment on most recent developments. Thus, this section may be used as a snapshot of Afghanistan's vulnerabilities, keeping in mind how much and how quickly the country has changed and is changing at the time of writing this report.

### 4.1 Poverty

The World Bank (2020) classifies Afghanistan as a low-income country. As mentioned above, a large proportion of the country's population are estimated to be living under the national PL of AFN2,268 (current, 2020) per capita per month (see Table 17). Note that, while 43.4 per cent of individuals aged 14 years or older live below this PL, this proportion rises to 51.4 per cent among children below the age of 14 years.

**Table 17. Population living above and below the national poverty line**

	Total population	Percentage
Above the PL	16,832,985	52.9
Below the PL	14,984,737	47.1

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Poverty rates vary between urban, rural and Kuchi populations, as summarised in Table 18. While they only vary slightly between urban and rural populations, the higher poverty rate among the Kuchis stands out.

**Table 18. Population living above and below the poverty line in urban, rural and Kuchi areas**

	Above PL	Below PL	Poverty rate
Urban	4,192,971	3,493,698	45%
Rural	12,043,434	10,639,357	47%
Kuchi	596,580	851,682	59%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Further, household structures differ between poor and non-poor populations. As Table 19 shows, poor households are younger, resulting in higher age, youth, and age and disability dependency ratios (see subsection 3.6). On the other hand, households living above the PL are slightly older, exemplified by a slightly higher old-age dependency ratio. These differences in dependency ratios could imply that life expectancy among those living above the PL is higher than among those living below it. However, these are minor differences, implying that living standards may not differ substantially between poor and non-poor households, at least if using the national PL.

This may suggest that young households are more likely to be living below the PL than older households and implies that living with children might be a sign of potential vulnerability and a determinant of poverty, as they are legally not allowed to work (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). However, more in-depth quantitative research would be necessary to investigate causal relationships.

**Table 19. Dependency ratios among poor and non-poor populations**

	Non-poor	Poor
Age	1.25	1.59
Youth	1.10	1.45
Old age	0.15	0.14
Disability	0.04	0.06
Age and disability	1.29	1.67

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As explained in the introduction to this report, the microdata available do not allow for a detailed analysis of exactly how much consumption and income changed in 2020 and 2021. Existing macro-level estimates, however, show that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the Afghan economy from 2020 onwards (World Bank Group 2021). Considering its impacts on poverty rates, a sharp divergence between urban and rural areas was identified. In rural areas, despite the onset of COVID-19, poverty continued to decline, following the trend prior to the pandemic, although at a much slower pace. The agricultural sector is estimated to have grown by 5.3 per cent in 2020 due to a less severe impact of COVID-19 and favourable weather (ibid.). In urban areas, by contrast, poverty increased up to 55.2 per cent during the COVID-19 crisis, reflecting the severe impacts of lockdown measures on employment opportunities (ibid.). It is estimated that the industry sector contracted by 4.2 per cent, while services declined by 4.6 per cent in 2020 (ibid.). Nevertheless, due to limited data and continually changing national economic policy, it remains an additional challenge to estimate the pandemic's concrete impacts on poverty.

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the country has been facing several additional adversities that may translate into additional shocks for the population. However, data on how exactly vulnerabilities have changed are scarce and hard to obtain. At the macro level, a continuing trade deficit, a lack of private investment and high levels of debt will likely continue to pose problems (UNDP Afghanistan 2021). A report published in September 2021 by the United Nations Development Programme projects that the Taliban takeover and previous crises may result in a 10–13 per cent reduction in gross domestic product (GDP), which, in turn, could culminate in a worst-case scenario of a poverty rate of up to 97 per cent by mid-2022 (ibid.).

## 4.2 Multidimensional poverty

Many of the multidimensional poverty indicators captured in the IE&LF 2020 data display close associations with the national PL. Differences between poor and non-poor households and individuals are particularly drastic for household assets, sanitation and literacy.

Regarding sanitation, the IE&LF 2020 data show that access to flush toilets differs substantially between those living above and below the national PL. Although access to such toilets is still relatively uncommon, with a national average of 8.6 per cent, 11.8 per cent of non-poor households have access to such toilets, compared to 4.2 per cent of poor households.

The infrastructure behind access to drinking water also highlights some differences in the living standards of poor and non-poor households.

- The main source of drinking water among both poor and non-poor households is the hand tap. The national average of 33.3 per cent of households with access differs between non-poor (34.5 per cent) and poor (31.7 per cent) households. However, note that this is a marginal difference, suggesting that living standards in both poor and non-poor households may still leave major room for improvement.

- Other relevant sources of drinking water used especially by poor households are public water connections (used by 8.8 per cent of poor and 4.6 per cent of non-poor households), surface water (12.4 per cent of poor and 9 per cent of non-poor households) and unprotected wells (6.9 per cent of poor and 7.7 per cent of non-poor households).

Similar to water sources, the indicators of access to electricity shown below suggest that non-poor households—at least as defined by the national PL—may not necessarily enjoy living standards radically better than those of poor households. A more in-depth analysis of inequality in Afghanistan would be necessary to better understand which groups enjoy considerably better living standards.

- The most widely used electricity source is solar energy, used by 56.5 per cent of households. It is used by a marginally higher proportion of poor households (57.6 per cent) than non-poor households (55.7 per cent).
- There is a slightly larger difference between the groups' access to an electric grid: 37.4 per cent of non-poor households versus 31.8 per cent of poor households.
- As a lighting source, electricity use is widespread among both non-poor (94.8 per cent) and poor households (86.7 per cent), despite the remaining gap between the groups. Other relevant lighting sources primarily used by poor households are light sources not in the house (2.7 per cent of poor and 0.6 per cent of non-poor households), gas (1.8 per cent and 0.9 per cent, respectively), fuel materials such as oil or soil oil (0.7 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively) and other sources, which are the lighting source for 8.1 per cent of poor households and 3.3 per cent of non-poor households.
- Disparities in the use of cooking fuel are slightly larger between poor and non-poor households. The most broadly used source among poor households is firewood (39.6 per cent of poor and 32.8 per cent of non-poor households), while gas is the most frequently used source among non-poor households (38.2 per cent of non-poor and 24.2 per cent of poor households). Poor households instead make more frequent use of sources such as animal waste (18.5 per cent of poor and 11.2 per cent of non-poor households) and agricultural residues (6.6 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively). Firewood is used by a similar proportion of both groups (10.0 per cent of poor and 12.8 per cent of non-poor households).

The ownership of certain essential assets, on the other hand, differs substantially between poor and non-poor households. Poor households are consistently more likely to lack refrigerators (no refrigerator in 89.8 per cent of poor households, compared to 76.8 per cent of non-poor households). Similar gaps apply for televisions (64.6 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively, without a TV), computers (98.0 per cent and 89.6 per cent, respectively), motorbikes (78.4 per cent and 71.7 per cent, respectively) and private cars (96.3 per cent of poor households and 84.6 per cent of non-poor households do not own a car).

Regarding housing conditions, the following disparities in living standards can be observed:

- Regarding floor materials, non-poor households seem more likely to afford concrete and tile floors: 23.4 per cent of non-poor households have such floors, compared to 11.5 per cent of poor households. By comparison, raw clay and soil floors are more common among poor households (86.6 per cent) than among non-poor households (73.3 per cent).
- Walls are built in most cases with raw clay and mud, especially in poor households (63.3 per cent), but also frequently in non-poor households (53.3 per cent). Baked clay and stone walls as well as concrete are more

likely to be used in non-poor households, while stone and mud walls are used in a similar proportion of both groups (20.3 per cent of non-poor and 21.8 per cent of poor households).

- Roofs are mainly constructed with concrete with skewers (63.3 per cent of non-poor and 66.1 per cent of poor households) or with frames baked with clay (14.8 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively). Larger disparities exist for roofs built of raw clay (used by 15.8 per cent of poor households and only 9.5 per cent of non-poor households).

Looking at the indicators related to education, there is a clearer correlation between poverty and education. Section 5.5 elaborates further on this.

- Nationally, 63 per cent of individuals aged 14 years and over are illiterate. However, 71 per cent of poor individuals are illiterate, compared to only 57 per cent of non-poor individuals over 14.
- School attendance of children aged 6–13 years seems to decrease with poverty. The 40.7 per cent attendance rate among poor children contrasts with 51.1 per cent among non-poor children.

Considering the impact of COVID-19 not only on the health sector but on multidimensional poverty is crucial. The number of people in acute need of humanitarian assistance rose by 9.4 million between early 2020 and June 2020 (OCHA 2020). In 2020, the World Bank Group (2020) estimated that poverty rates could grow by 10–17 per cent directly due to the pandemic and its economic impact, which would hit the urban population hardest. This manifests itself in increasing food insecurity, with 35 per cent of the population in need of urgent assistance (IPC 2020b), and a lack of adequate sanitation, clean water and energy supply (Gardiwal 2021). Children are thought to be suffering disproportionately, especially in terms of basic living conditions and schooling, which may lead to an increase in multidimensional poverty from 51.7 per cent to 60.9 per cent across the population (ibid.). While current data since the Taliban seized control are scarce, the situation can be assumed to have worsened further. UNDP Afghanistan (2021) estimates a worst-case scenario with a potentially near-universal poverty rate, as mentioned previously.

### 4.3 Employment

Among the total population aged 14 years or older (thus including the elderly population over 54 years),<sup>6</sup> 58.8 per cent of the population are inactive, 30.8 per cent are employed, 5.4 per cent are underemployed, and 4.92 per cent are unemployed. The large inactive population can be explained by the low participation of women in the labour force, as 84.3 per cent of women and girls over the age of 14 are inactive. As such, only 28 per cent of inactive individuals aged 14 or older are men. Table 20 further disaggregates the activity status of individuals aged 14 or older by sex in absolute numbers.

Table 21 breaks down the activity status of individuals aged 14 or older living above and below the PL. Note that the proportions of each activity status are similar among the poor and non-poor populations. However, individuals living above the national PL seem more likely to be employed. The similar proportions of inactive populations are also noteworthy, suggesting that economic inactivity could be primarily linked to gender norms, rather than poverty. Indeed, 83.5 per cent of women and girls living above the national PL are inactive—just a little below the 85.2 per cent living below the national PL.

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6. As mentioned in the Methodology subsection, the definition of working age as 14–54 years was primarily for the calculation of dependency ratios. Given that people older than 54 may still work, they were included in the analysis in this section.

**Table 20. Activity status by sex**

	Male	Female	Total
Employed	4,494,780	814,178	5,308,958
Underemployed	628,474	302,527	931,001
Unemployed	607,223	241,694	848,917
Inactive	2,842,872	7,305,684	10,148,556
Total	8,573,349	8,664,083	17,237,432

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Comparing urban, rural and Kuchi populations, activity statuses vary considerably, as summarised in Table 22. Note that the proportion of the inactive population is lowest among Kuchi individuals aged 14 years or older, followed by that of the rural population, making urban rates of inactivity the highest. This may be because female participation in the labour force is highest among Kuchi women (28.2 per cent), compared to those in rural (16.8 per cent) and urban areas (10.8 per cent). While Table 18 shows that poverty rates are highest among Kuchi, followed by rural populations, national inactivity rates are not very different between poor and non-poor women. Thus, one can speculate whether the different labour force participation rates are linked to the nature of work in urban, rural and Kuchi areas, rather than poverty intervening in women's abilities to comply with gender norms. However, the analysis presented in this study does not suffice to draw conclusions on causality.

**Table 21. Activity status among people living above and below the national poverty line**

	Above	Below
Employed	32.5%	28.6%
Underemployed	4.2%	5.9%
Unemployed	5.2%	5.7%
Inactive	58.1%	59.8%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

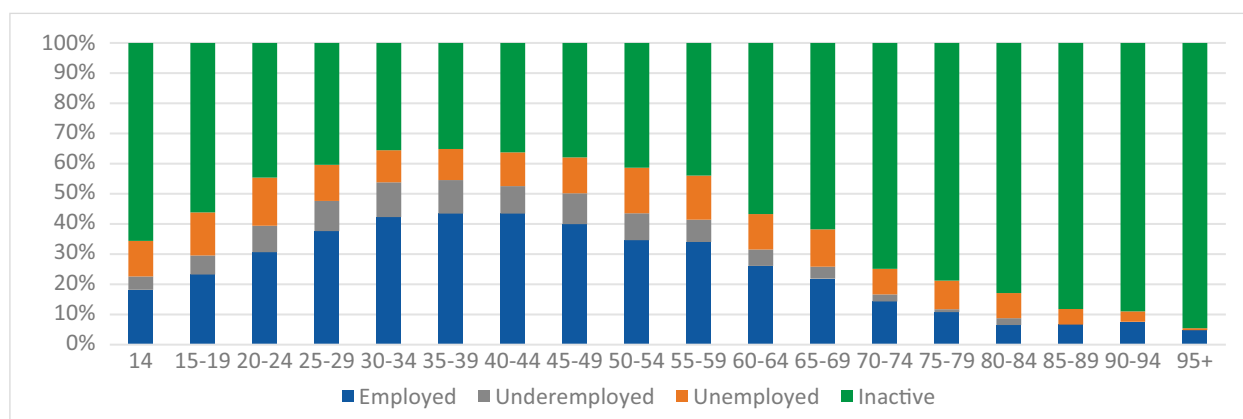
**Table 22. Activity status in urban, rural and Kuchi areas**

	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Employed	28.1%	31%	45.1%
Underemployed	1.7%	6.9%	4.8%
Unemployed	5.7%	4.7%	3.2%
Inactive	64.5%	57.4%	46.9%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As Figure 21 shows, youth (14–24 years old) are predominantly inactive. Note also that many elderly people work past the age of 55, predominantly those living above the national PL. As Table 21 shows, elderly people are more likely to be employed, although the difference of four percentage points is rather small. The rather similar necessity for poor and non-poor elderly people to work implies that the non-poor do not necessarily enjoy much higher living standards, at least when using the national consumption-based PL.

**Figure 21. Activity status by age**



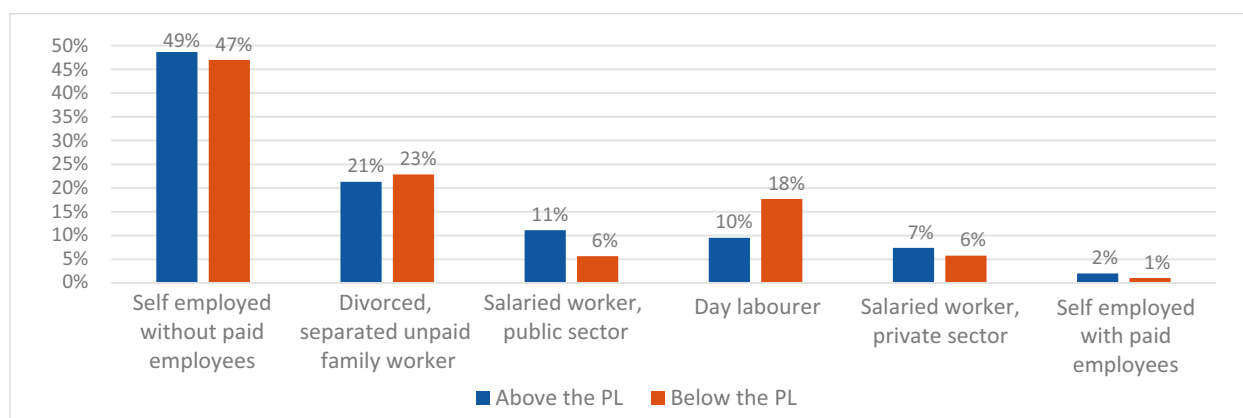
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 23. Activity status among the elderly population**

Activity status	General	Poor	Non-poor
Employed	22.46%	19.97%	24.17%
Unemployed	2.71%	3.78%	1.97%
Underemployed	3.27%	3.52%	3.14%
Inactive	71.56%	72.73%	70.73%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 22. Type of (main) work among people living above and below the poverty line**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Looking more closely at individuals' employment conditions, the types of work people are engaged in do not seem very predictive of their likelihood to be living below the PL. As Figure 22 shows, the only types of work that seem to differ significantly between people living below and above the PL are those of day labourers, who are more likely to be living below the PL, and salaried workers in the public sector, who are more likely to be living above the PL. The latter could imply that public-sector work offers better conditions than other work, including higher salaries. Regarding day labour, as Kumar and Fernandez (2016) suggest, many urban poor and internal migrants from rural areas engage in day labour for the construction industry. These types of jobs in construction tend to be quite seasonal, and those who

cannot live in urban or peri-urban areas nearby might be housed at construction sites themselves (ibid.). However, given that the construction industry is one of the main contributors to national GDP, it is likely that this sector also enables considerable wealth accumulation (Niazi and Painting 2017).

When breaking down poverty rates by type of main work (see Figure 22 and Table 24), the only types of work with a majority of workers living above the PL are self-employed people with paid employees (with the lowest poverty rate), followed by salaried workers, with public-sector employees less likely to live in poverty than employees in the private sector.

**Table 24. Poverty rates by type of work**

Type of work	Poor
Day labourer	56.6%
Salaried worker, private sector	35.4%
Salaried worker, public sector	26.3%
Self-employed without paid employees	40.4%
Self-employed with paid employees	26.9%
Unpaid family worker	43.0%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Table 25 compares the type of work undertaken by men and women of working age.<sup>7</sup> Note that women are overrepresented in those engaging in unpaid family work (60.2 per cent of women, compared to 13 per cent of men). Based on the evidence available about *purdah* practices (Ritchie 2016), these findings seem to imply that women primarily engage in unpaid reproductive work or support family activities. It also stands out that women seem to be less likely to work if they must be hired by an employer, as—after working for their families—the next most common type of work in which women are engaged is being self-employed without paid employees. This could also be due to *purdah* (ibid.).

**Table 25. Type of work by sex**

Type of work	Male	Female
Day labourer	15.4%	2.1%
Salaried worker, private sector	7.7%	2.2%
Salaried worker, public sector	9.6%	5.2%
Self-employed without paid employees	52.4%	29.4%
Self-employed with paid employees	1.8%	0.7%
Unpaid family worker	13.0%	60.2%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Types of work also differ between urban, rural and Kuchi workers, as summarised in Table 26. Among all three groups, workers are most likely to be self-employed without paid employees. Given Afghanistan's predominantly rural population, this type of work is predominantly present in rural areas, with 74.7 per cent of self-employed workers without paid employees living in such areas. Two types of work that are skewed towards urban areas, despite the urban population being much smaller than the rural population, are those of salaried private-sector

<sup>7</sup> Anyone 14 years old or older; not only the working-age population.



workers and salaried public-sector workers. Around 45 per cent of salaried private-sector workers live in urban areas, and 41.3 per cent of those working in the public sector. Together, these two types of work involve 31.7 per cent of urban workers. Although 58.5 per cent of salaried public-sector workers and 52.5 per cent of those in the private sector live in rural areas, only 11.9 per cent of the rural population are engaged in such work. Among Kuchi workers, this proportion falls to 3.1 per cent. Note that, based on Table 24, these two employment types have lower poverty rates.

After self-employment without paid employees, Kuchi workers are primarily engaged in unpaid family work. While this type of work is still predominantly taking place in rural areas, with 84.3 per cent of unpaid family workers living there, it has a relatively large proportion of Kuchi workers (10 per cent).

**Table 26. Type of work of urban, rural and Kuchi populations**

Type of work	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Day labourer	15.4%	12.5%	9.0%
Salaried worker, private sector	14.3%	4.8%	2.9%
Salaried worker, public sector	17.4%	7.1%	0.2%
Self-employed without paid employees	44.1%	49.1%	49.8%
Self-employed with paid employees	2.9%	1.4%	0.4%
Unpaid family worker	6.0%	25.3%	37.6%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As mentioned in the Methodology subsection, the IE&LF microdata do not contain information to identify informal workers. However, it was possible to create a proxy of **vulnerable** workers, based on the definition outlined in subsection 1.1. People living below the PL are more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment than those living above it, with 87.5 per cent of the poor population working in such conditions, as shown in Table 27.

**Table 27. Individuals living above and below the poverty line engaged in vulnerable employment**

	Above PL	Below PL
Not vulnerable employment	20.5%	12.5%
Vulnerable employment	79.5%	87.5%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As Table 28 shows, however, women are more likely than men to be engaged in vulnerable employment. Considering previous findings on the employment status and type of work done by women, we find that women are less likely to be employed and, when they are, seem to be employed in worse conditions. The fact that 79.1 per cent of vulnerable workers are male may distract from this.

**Table 28. Individuals engaged in vulnerable employment, by sex**

	Male	Female
Not vulnerable employment	19.2%	8.2%
Vulnerable employment	79.5%	87.5%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Major disparities can also be found in the likelihood of urban, rural and Kuchi workers engaging in vulnerable employment, as summarised in Table 29. These proportions reinforce the notion that workers in urban areas may benefit from better employment contracts, potentially guaranteeing decent working conditions and possibly higher salaries.

**Table 29. Individuals in urban, rural and Kuchi areas engaged in vulnerable employment**

	Not vulnerable employment	Vulnerable employment
Urban	34.6%	65.4%
Rural	13.2%	86.8%
Kuchi	3.6%	96.5%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

The above-mentioned findings on Afghan workers show how few of them are either fully or decently employed. This suggests that, already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate and security shocks that followed, a worrying proportion of Afghanistan's population may have lacked sufficient and stable livelihoods to not only protect themselves from shocks but also to guarantee decent living conditions.

While data on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic must be considered carefully, a World Bank Group publication from April 2021 provides some estimates on the effects of the pandemic on different workers. According to the World Bank Group (2021), the pandemic did not impact the agricultural sector strongly enough to impede its growth compared to 2020. Instead, it mainly affected the industry and service sectors due to border closures and lockdowns. Note that these two sectors were already suffering due to the unstable political situation prior to the pandemic. As such, while an estimated 47 per cent of agricultural workers and 43 per cent of service workers lost income during the pandemic, 78 per cent of workers engaged in the industrial sector reported income losses (*ibid.*). Note that it is not clear from this source whether these workers were somewhat vulnerable to begin with or not.

What these World Bank estimates do say about **informal** workers is that the pandemic reversed improvements in the working conditions of self-employed and casual workers. Lockdowns negatively impacted the livelihoods of construction workers, drivers, street vendors and the like. As such, the earnings of own-account workers reportedly fell by 14 per cent, and those of casual workers by 15 per cent between Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020. The same source also states that those employed in health, education and government—maybe what the IE&LF 2020 calls salaried public-sector employees—were not greatly impacted by the pandemic (*ibid.*).

With the Taliban takeover in August 2021, it is even harder to project how work-related vulnerabilities will change. One UNDP Afghanistan (2021) report comments on the exclusion of women from public life by the Taliban. If this gender-based discrimination in the public sphere continues, it is likely that the already scarce female participation in the labour force will decrease further in the future.

## 4.4 Education

As implied in subsection 4.2, there seems to be a link between poverty and educational attainment in Afghanistan. Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of the country's population aged 14 years or older are illiterate (Table 30). This proportion is even higher among women, and among people living below the PL, with only 22.6 per cent of women and 29 per cent of poor Afghans knowing how to read. Related to this, 62.9 per cent of the population aged 14 or older (and 75.4 per cent of women) reportedly have no education, as illustrated in Table 31. Looking at educational attainment disaggregated by sex reveals that women become increasingly underrepresented as education levels increase (see Figure 23). A notable exception is teacher college, although women are still in the minority. Note that women are underrepresented in the sample, however, making it likely that the proportion of less educated women is even higher.

**Table 30.** Literacy among individuals aged 14 years or older, by sex

	Male	Female
Literate	51.1%	22.6%
Illiterate	48.9%	77.4%

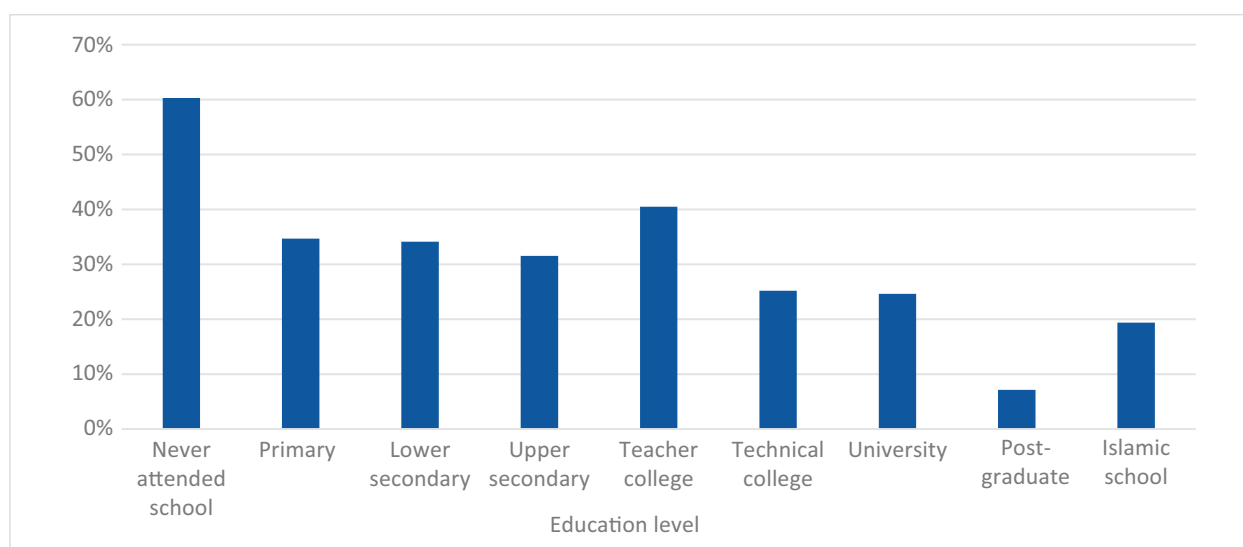
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 31.** Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older, by sex

Educational attainment	Male	Female	Both sexes
Never attended school	50.2%	75.4%	62.9%
Primary	10.2%	5.4%	7.8%
Lower secondary	12.0%	6.1%	9.0%
Upper secondary	15.8%	7.2%	11.5%
Teacher college	1.7%	1.2%	1.4%
Technical college	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%
University	6.1%	2.0%	4.0%
Post-graduate	0.5%	0.04%	0.3%
Islamic school	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 23.** Proportion of women and girls among population aged 14 years or older who have completed each education level



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

There are also significant discrepancies in literacy and educational attainment between individuals aged 14 years or older in urban, rural and Kuchi areas. Tables 32 and 34, and Figures 24 to 26 summarise evidence that implies that people living in urban areas are more likely to be higher skilled. However, even among the more highly educated urban population, educational attainment is still precarious. As illustrated in Figure 24, almost half of the urban population have never attended school, and the vast majority never finished secondary education. Further, as illustrated in Table 32, almost half of urban individuals aged 14 or older cannot read and write.

**Table 32.** Literacy among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban, rural and Kuchi areas

	Literate	Illiterate
Urban	54.43%	45.57%
Rural	31.73%	68.27%
Kuchi	6.39%	93.61%

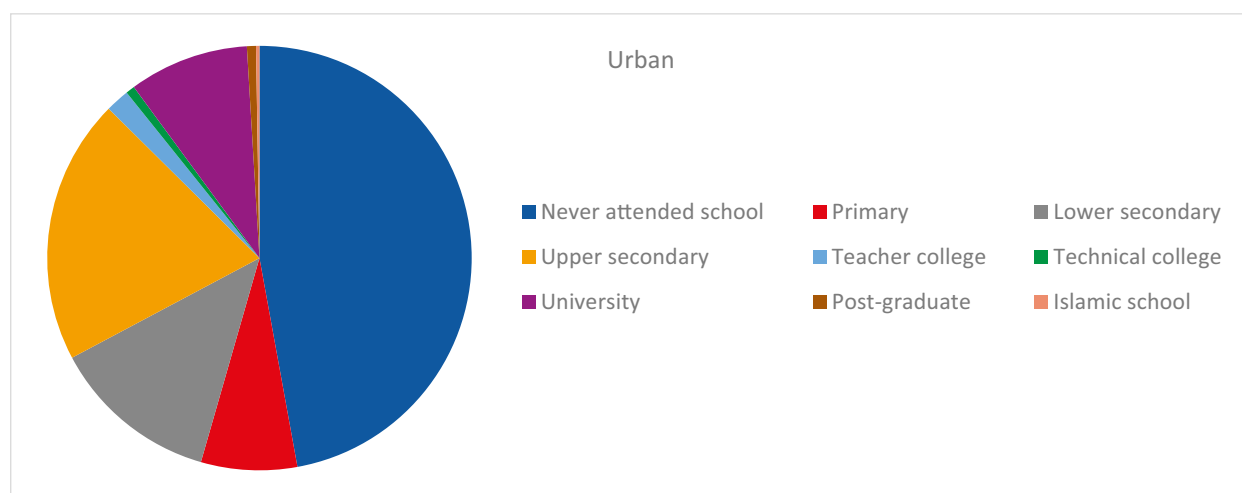
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 33.** Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban, rural and Kuchi areas

	Urban	Rural	Kuchi	Total
Never attended school	46.6%	67.3%	94.8%	62.9%
Primary	7.2%	8.4%	1%	7.8%
Lower secondary	12.6%	8.1%	0.8%	9%
Upper secondary	20%	8.9%	0.4%	11.5%
Teacher college	1.8%	1.4%	0%	1.4%
Technical college	0.7%	0.3%	0%	0.4%
University	9%	2.3%	0.3%	4%
Post-graduate	0.7%	0.1%	0%	0.3%
Islamic school	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

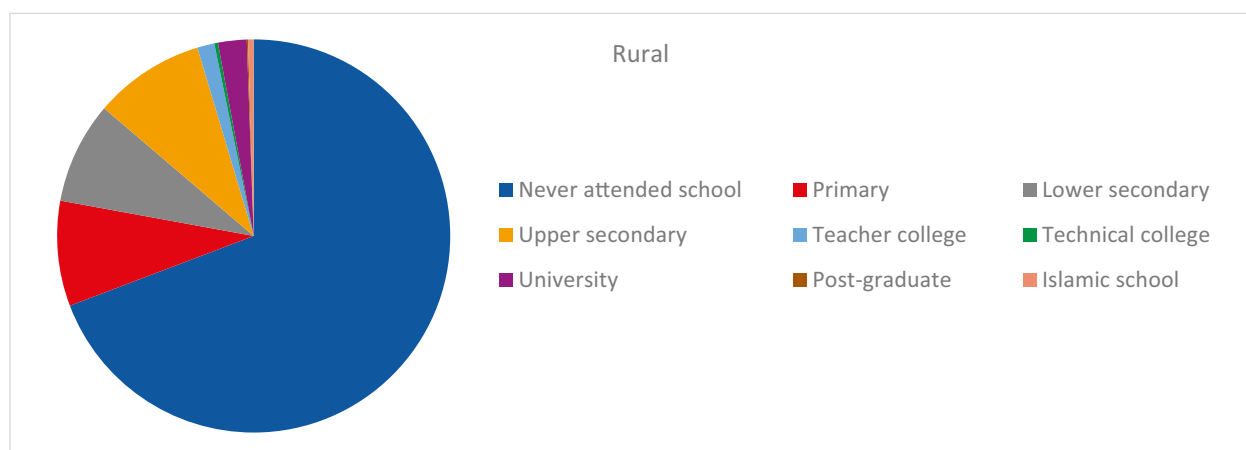
**Figure 24.** Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in urban areas



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

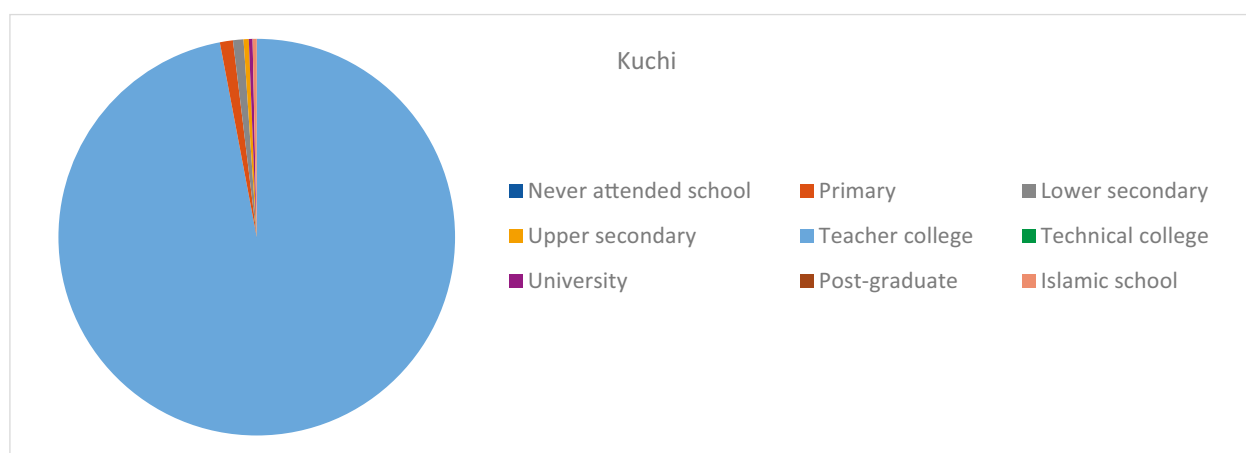
Nevertheless, the picture becomes more nuanced when disaggregating educational attainment by age group. As Figure 27 shows, literacy rates improve among the younger population segments, suggesting that access to education had been increasing over time up to 2020. Note that literacy among children aged 6–9 and 10–14 years is lower than among the slightly older age groups. This could suggest that some improvements in education have either recently been lost for parts of the younger generation or that children tend to learn to read and write later in life. Among children aged 6–9 years, it is likely to be linked to when children start attending school, as those under 6 are still below the legal age for schooling.

**Figure 25.** Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in rural areas



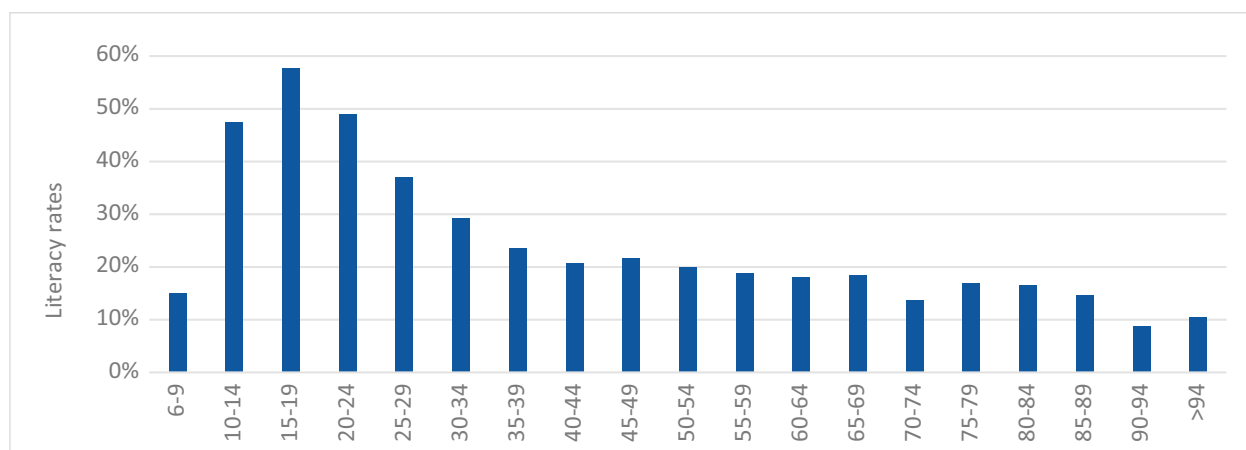
Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 26.** Highest completed level of education among individuals aged 14 years or older in Kuchi areas



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 27.** Literacy by age

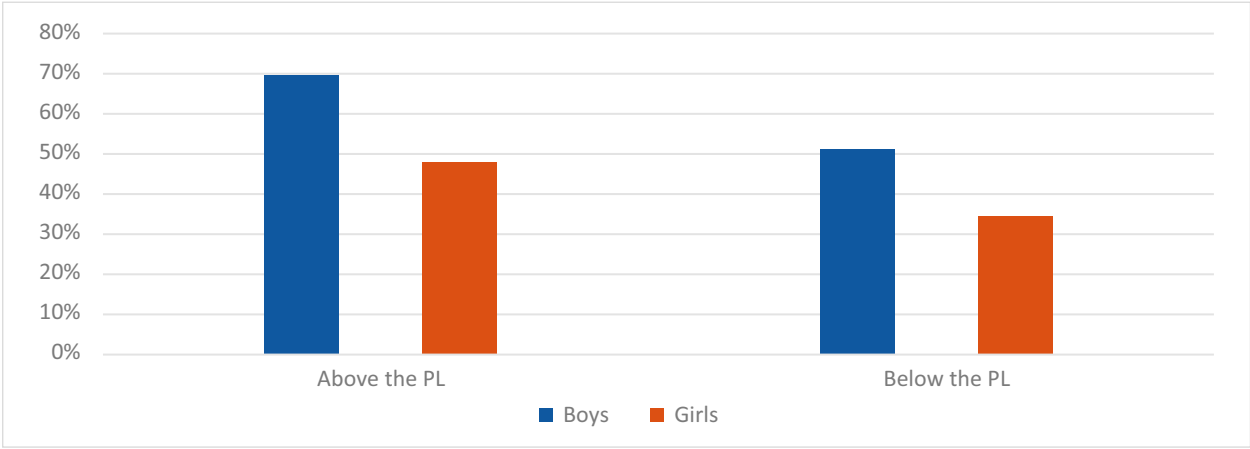


Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

However, a closer look at highest completed education level shows that there is still room for improvement. Just 39 per cent of older adolescents (15–19 years) had reportedly never attended school at the time of the survey, compared to 38.4 per cent of all children aged 10–14 years and almost half of individuals aged 20–24 years.

Further, what is known about literacy among school-aged children aged 10–17 years reveals a large gap between the sexes. While 62 per cent of boys can read, only 41 per cent of girls are literate. This disparity between boys and girls is present for poor and non-poor children (see Figure 28). Moreover, disparities in literacy rates between urban, rural and Kuchi children aged 10–17 are relatively large: 74 per cent of those living in urban areas, 45 per cent in rural areas and only 4 per cent of Kuchi are literate.

**Figure 28.** Literacy rates among children aged 10–17 years living above and below the national poverty line, by sex



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Having looked at literacy, other education indicators such as school attendance<sup>8</sup> show other aspects of vulnerability concerning children. At the national level, 50 per cent of all school-aged children have reportedly attended formal school at some point in their lives. Of those who have, 84.5 per cent went to school in the year the IE&LF was conducted (1398 using the Solar Hijri calendar).<sup>9</sup> Among boys, 86 per cent of those having ever attended school reportedly attended in the year 1398. Among girls, this proportions lies at 82 per cent.

Similar to literacy rates, children in both urban and rural areas are more likely than Kuchi children to have ever attended school. While 83 per cent of urban and 85 per cent of rural children attended school in 1398, for Kuchi children this figure is 74 per cent.

School attendance also varies between children living above and below the PL, with lower school attendance rates being associated with poverty. Only 45 per cent of children of school age living below the PL have ever attended school, compared to 56 per cent of non-poor children. The likelihood of returning to school among those children who have already attended at some point in life seems relatively consistent. Among poor and non-poor children, no less than 83 per cent returned to school in 1398. Among poor children this rate was actually 86 per cent, compared to 83 per cent of non-poor children.

8. Note that the English translation of the IE&LF 2020 survey asks about 'attendance' specifically.

9. Equivalent to March 2019 to March 2020.

However, note that the education indicators described above are likely to deteriorate after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. In particular, the gender gaps in educational attainment highlighted by the IE&LF 2020 data may deepen under the approach to female education instituted under the Taliban government. As women and girls are prevented from attending educational institutions, their education indicators are bound to deteriorate (UNDP Afghanistan 2021). As of January 2022, senior Taliban leaders announced that girls would be going back to school by March 2022 after effectively being barred from attending classes at most secondary schools and universities since August 2021 (Abbasi 2021; Al Jazeera 2022). If female education does not return and continue, any improvement in education among younger generations, such as their higher literacy rates illustrated previously in this section, may be lost.

## 4.5 Nutrition

As a final indicator of vulnerability in Afghanistan, this section builds on secondary data to highlight the state of chronic and transitory food insecurity in the country since the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional crises that have ensued since.

A record high of nearly 19 million people in Afghanistan face chronic and transitory food insecurity, and 14 million people, mainly in the country's central and northern parts, suffer from acute food insecurity. Almost 3.2 million children under 5 years will likely suffer from malnutrition by late 2021 (UNICEF ROSA 2021). Accordingly, three out of four households are now estimated to limit portion sizes; adults are eating less so that their children can eat more (WFP 2021a). Female-headed households are skipping meals more frequently than male-headed households (WFP 2021b). More than three in four households (79.7 per cent) now need to borrow food or are forced to consume cheaper, less nutritious food (74.5 per cent) (*ibid.*).

Analysis of food insecurity based on the classifications 'crisis' or 'emergency' of an IPC report between September and October 2021 exposed high levels of acute food insecurity in rural and urban areas due to a combination of drought, violent conflict and economic crisis (IPC 2020a). Twenty-five of Afghanistan's 34 provinces recently suffered a severe drought (FAO 2021a). Below-average rainfall and snow resulted in reduced water for cultivation (FEWS NET 2021). Further problems faced by up to 60 per cent of crop producers were crop diseases and pests, as well as difficulties purchasing seeds due to high prices and low availability (FAO 2021b). In consequence, food prices skyrocketed, and an interruption to economic activities and essential services also caused food insecurity to rise further.

The worsening violent conflict throughout 2021 displaced at least 664,000 people, causing grave disruptions to people's livelihoods (IPC 2021). The power shift in August 2021 and the related freezing of USD9.5 billion in Afghan national assets has led to a substantial decline in the national economy (*ibid.*). The national currency—the afghani (AFN)—lost approximately 12.5 per cent of its value in the wake of the Taliban takeover, which led to increases in unemployment and, combined with the above-mentioned environmental factors, further inflated food prices (*ibid.*). Early indications from the World Food Programme in September 2021 estimate that 95 per cent of households do not have sufficient food, which constitutes an increase of 15 per cent compared to the situation before August 2021 (WFP 2021b). This heightened food insecurity affects rural and urban households alike (*ibid.*).

The consequences of insufficient nutrition and high food prices are manifold in their impact on health, especially for young mothers and children (UNICEF ROSA 2021). According to Global Nutrition Report (2021), prior to the political crisis and remaining uncertainty over the long-term effects of the pandemic, Afghanistan had been projected to meet two key targets for maternal, infant and child nutrition. Anaemia, however, continued to pose a severe problem for young women, affecting 42 per cent of women aged 15–49 years. Insufficient data make assessments of birthweight targets difficult. Meanwhile, progress was made to meet the breastfeeding target of 57.5 per cent of infants up to 5 months old being breastfed (*ibid.*). For children under 5 years, additional progress was achieved to reduce stunting. Nevertheless, 41 per cent of children under 5 years continue to suffer as a consequence of malnutrition (FAO 2021b, citing UNICEF 2020), compared to the Asian average of 21.8 per cent (Global Nutrition Report 2021).

Moreover, Afghanistan had progressed in reducing wasting, but 5.1 per cent of children under 5 years continue to be affected, which is lower than the 8.9 per cent average across Asia. Obesity and overweight affect 4.1 per cent of children under 5 years (ibid.).

## 5. SHOCKS AND COPING MECHANISMS

The following section elaborates on the proportion of Afghan households that fall victim to strong negative events (shocks), the types of shocks they face and their most common coping mechanisms. Note that data are only available at the household level. It is, therefore, not possible to closely analyse individual impacts of shocks or individual coping mechanisms, or to identify any gendered, age-related or other coping strategies specific to particular groups.

According to the IE&LF 2020, around 69 per cent of Afghanistan’s population lived in a household that had been impacted by a shock in the 12 months prior to the survey (NSIA 2021a). Whether all of those individuals actually experienced and were impacted by this event cannot be deduced from the data available. As Table 34 summarises, poor households reported to have experienced shocks more often than households living above the national PL. Note that the causal relationship here is not clear: these households may have been poor at the time the IE&LF was conducted precisely because they had experienced a shock that year, or they may be more vulnerable to shocks because of their financial deprivation. However, note that, as Table 34 shows, a considerable proportion of non-poor households also reported having experienced shocks.

**Table 34. Percentage of non-poor and poor individuals who experienced events in the past 12 months that strongly and negatively impacted them**

	Non-poor households	Poor households
Yes	66.5%	72.8%
No	33.6%	27.2%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

As shown in Table 35, the most common shocks reported by households in Afghanistan during the 2019-2020 survey period were unusually high food prices, followed by reduced drinking water, strongly reduced household income, and insecurity or violence. Note that the IE&LF 2020 allowed households to name three types of shocks.

The IE&LF 2020 also asked households to name all coping mechanisms they used to deal with these shocks. As Table 36 shows, most households that experienced a shock in the 12 months preceding the survey did nothing to compensate for the shock. Note that the proportion changes just slightly among poor households, with harmful coping mechanisms such as decreasing food quality and purchasing food on credit more common among households living below the PL. At the same time, poor households were also slightly more likely to report receiving help from the community. The most common coping mechanisms among all households that experienced a shock were to decrease household expenditures, reduce food quality, take loans from relatives or friends and receive help from their communities.

The IE&LF 2020 survey does not include social protection or relief programmes as potential coping mechanisms to respond to shocks. It asks one question unrelated to shocks on day labour which includes engagement in cash- or food-for-work programmes, although these programmes are not differentiated from other day labour activities. Using the variable pertaining to this question, around 22 per cent of individuals living in households that experienced a shock in the 12 months prior to the survey also worked as day labourers, possibly as part of a cash- or food-for-work programme. In comparison, 14 per cent of individuals living in households that experienced no shocks engaged in such activities. However, in addition to the lack of clear distinction of who engaged in day labour as part of a labour



market programme, no causal relationship can be deduced from this. On the one hand, day labourers may be more vulnerable to shocks. On the other hand, being affected by a shock may push more individuals into cash- or food-for-work programmes and, thus, increase the number of day labourers.

**Table 35. Shock types experienced by individuals in the 12 months preceding the IE&LF 2020**

Type of shock	Number of individuals who live in households that experienced this shock	Percentage of individuals living in households that experienced a shock that experienced this shock	Percentage of all individuals in Afghanistan that experienced this shock
Unusually high increases in food prices	15,487,717	69.5%	49%
Reduced drinking water	4,898,511	34.6%	24.4%
Strongly reduced household income (e.g. loss of employment or salary, business bankruptcy)	5,163,128	23.2%	16.3%
Insecurity, violence	4,977,171	22.3%	15.7%
Unusual decrease in farm gate prices	2,797,677	12.6%	8.9%
Reduced availability of grazing areas	1,738,741	7.8%	5.5%
Serious illness, accident or death of a working household member	1,548,427	6.9%	4.9%
Extreme weather conditions negatively affecting crops or income	1,517,565	6.8%	4.8%
Unusually high level of crop pests or diseases	1,362,226	6.1%	4.3%
Theft	1,028,528	4.6%	3.3%
Natural disaster (earthquakes, landslides, avalanches)	999,458	4.5%	3.2%
Serious illness, accident or death of other household member	921,240	4.1%	2.9%
Loss of house, land or livestock	893,737	4%	2.8%
Unusually high level livestock diseases	777,121	3.5%	2.5%
Reduced availability of Kuchi migration routes	647,293	2.9%	2.1%
Large influx of returnee households	631,222	2.8%	2%
Severe loss of opium production	354,796	1.6%	1.1%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and other climate and security crises that impacted Afghanistan throughout 2020 and 2021 are major shocks whose impacts must be discussed in this section through secondary data. The pandemic hit Afghanistan in February 2020. As the first cases were reported, the country was already dealing with a fragile health care system, security concerns, falling income from remittances related to job losses of Afghans abroad (linked to the pandemic), and flood season (IPC-IG and UNICEF ROSA 2020). According to the World Bank Group (2021), Afghanistan had registered around 55,000 cases and 2,400 deaths by February 2021. To respond to this health crisis, lockdowns were instituted, and humanitarian and state actors articulated a humanitarian and social protection response (IPC-IG and UNICEF ROSA 2020). However, throughout 2020 and 2021, the pandemic exacerbated the vulnerabilities described in Section 4, as already covered in its respective subsections (IPC 2020a; World Bank Group 2021).

**Table 36. Coping mechanisms used by households to cope with shocks**

Type of coping mechanism	Percentage of households that experienced a shock in the past 12 months that employed this coping mechanism (as primary, secondary or tertiary coping strategy)	Percentage of poor households that experienced a shock in the past 12 months that employed this coping mechanism (as primary, secondary or tertiary coping strategy)
Did not need to do anything to compensate	71.1%	68.1%
Decreased food quality	41.7%	47.2%
Reduced amount of food or skipped meals	12.5%	12.6%
Decreased expenditures	54.5%	58.6%
Purchased food on credit from traders	26.6%	29.1%
Sold labour in advance	5.6%	5.9%
Took loans from relative or friends	21.5%	21.3%
Took loans from money lenders	3.1%	2.7%
Received help from others in the community	21%	25.1%
Begging	1.6%	1.9%
Sold farmland	2.9%	2.3%
Rented out or mortgaged out farmland	4%	2.7%
Sold poultry or livestock	8.7%	9.3%
Sold assets	5%	3.7%
Dropped children out of school	2.3%	2.5%
Children who were not working started working	5.4%	5.8%
Married girl child/children	0.8%	1.2%
Worked more or longer hours	13.9%	13.6%
Household members go to work elsewhere	7.9%	8.2%
Other	12.8%	14.1%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

Prior to the Taliban takeover, the World Bank Group (2021) already estimated that Afghanistan would have difficulties recovering from the impacts of COVID-19, as it was also struggling with other issues. Climate-related shocks such as droughts had already been identified as major hurdles for the country to overcome. According to the World Bank Group (2021), rural poverty rates would increase, as these droughts would undermine subsistence agriculture, among other types. Based on a telephone survey conducted between August and November 2020, the World Bank Group (2021) identified major setbacks to poverty reduction due to the pandemic. Self-employed respondents in particular reported major income losses, with 71 per cent of them reporting having suffered from a shock due to the pandemic negatively impacting their incomes. Note that, in general, most respondents (63 per cent) reported a loss in earnings, while a smaller proportion reported wage loss (23 per cent). Probably linked to this, 39 per cent of the people interviewed reported that their ability to meet their nutrition and other basic needs deteriorated during the pandemic. Further, the World Bank Group (2021) also found that respondents lacked savings and income to adequately cope with shocks. Note that more women (68 per cent) than men (48 per cent) reported this.

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has been facing several macroeconomic challenges related to the Taliban takeover. Some countries have, for example, frozen Afghanistan's foreign reserves. These macroeconomic challenges are expected to cause further deterioration in the country's development indicators, with impacts on poverty, gender and food insecurity already discussed in Section 4. UNDP Afghanistan (2021) expects these shocks to primarily affect

the urban poor and rural areas. According to its rapid assessment from September 2021, UNDP expects impacted communities to consider migration as one coping strategy, as around half a million individuals were displaced in 2021 prior to the Taliban takeover.

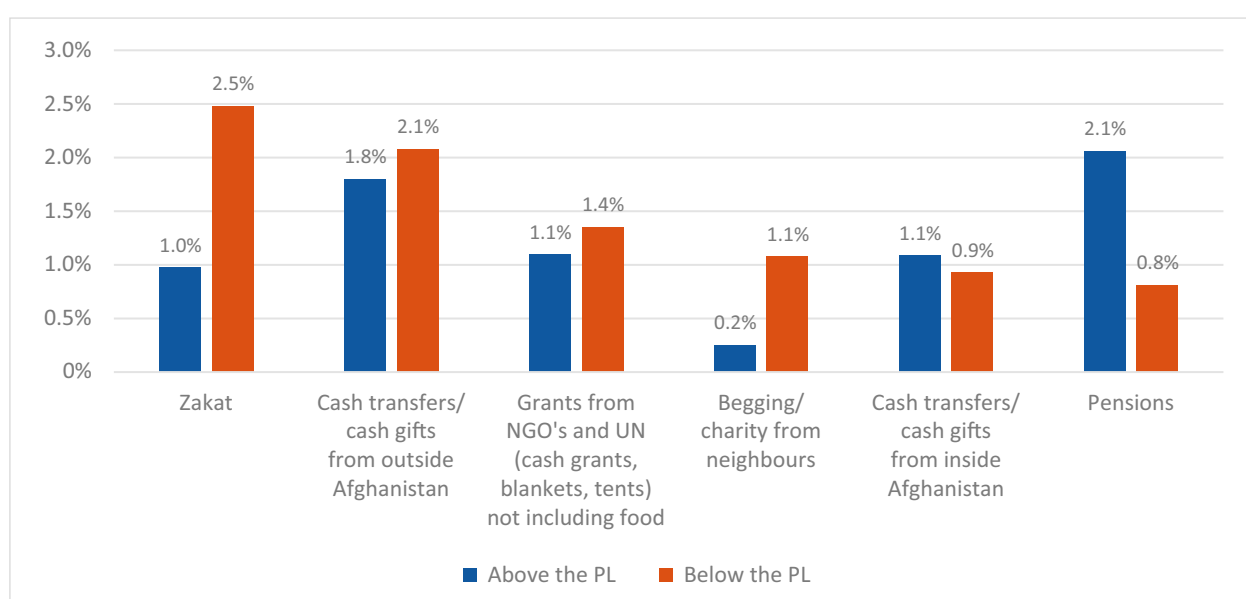
## 6. USAGE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Considering the above-mentioned vulnerabilities and shocks, this section discusses the available data on the population's demand for and usage of social protection.

The IE&LF 2020 data do not contain extensive information on a variety of social protection programmes. The closest to this would be the variable mentioned in the previous section that enquires about income from day labour, including cash- or food-for-work programmes. As this variable does not differentiate social protection programmes such as labour market interventions from other employment opportunities, no major conclusions can be drawn regarding social protection coverage. Note that around a quarter of individuals living below the national PL reportedly earned income as day labourers, possibly including through cash- or food-for-work programmes. Even if all day labourers were beneficiaries of such social protection programmes, coverage would be low.

To complement these findings, Figure 29 considers alternative sources of household income in the year up to the IE&LF 2020 survey that may be interpreted as (informal) social protection, charity or humanitarian action. Note that not even 5 per cent of households (living above or below the PL) reported having received income from those sources. While some underreporting of income may be a limitation, these findings nonetheless imply low coverage of income from (informal) social protection, humanitarian assistance and private charity. Note that, as summarised in Table 36 in the previous section, about a fifth of households living above and a quarter of households living below the PL reportedly receive help from their communities as coping mechanisms. This could imply that, given a lack of social protection, part of the responsibility falls on community members. Note that the microdata available do not enable an analysis of potential issues with social protection supply (existing social protection programmes and lack of access to such programmes).

**Figure 29. Percentage of households living below and above the national PL that receive alternative sources of income**



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

## 6.1 Pre-COVID-19 social protection

The lack of individuals who reportedly benefit from social protection programmes is no surprise considering the lack of national, government-led social protection programmes prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. A mapping exercise conducted by the IPC-IG between September 2019 and April 2020 that focused on national, State-led programmes identified two social assistance programmes, two labour market programmes and one social insurance programme, although old-age pensions for private-sector and NGO workers were entering Afghanistan's social protection system at that time. When this mapping was conducted, none of the programmes covered people who were not classified as the most deprived or as rather privileged public-sector workers. This left an extremely large 'missing middle' without any social protection that was vulnerable to shocks.

The two labour market programmes identified were the Maintenance and Construction Cash Grant (MCCG)—part of the fifth component of the Citizens' Charter National Priority Programme—and the Women's Economic Empowerment Rural Development Project. The MCCG was a cash-for-work programme for labour-intensive public works projects that covered up to 35 per cent of a community's households and employed one person from each eligible poor household. Workers received a daily wage of AFN350 for unskilled labour and AFN650 for skilled labour for up to 40 labour days to buy food over the three-month lean season (World Bank 2017a; 2017b; 2017c). The Women's Economic Empowerment Rural Development Project included one component that the IPC-IG classified as social protection—namely, a labour market initiative providing technical assistance and improved access to markets for women with similar economic interests. Under this component, these women formed enterprise groups (of 8–20 members) or producer associations (50–500 members) under a single business plan. Enterprise groups were eligible for catalytic grants of up to USD2,000, and producer associations for grants of an equivalent maximum amount scalable to their size. Priority was given to pro-poor, high-value commodities where women could participate, such as agricultural goods (vegetables, milk and poultry) and handicrafts. Support was primarily given to buying inputs, post-production equipment or small-scale infrastructure (World Bank 2018a; 2018b).

The two social assistance programmes included the Social Inclusion Grant, which was also part of the fifth component of the Citizens' Charter National Priority Programme, and the Martyrs and Disabled Pension Programme. The Social Inclusion Grant acknowledged that not every vulnerable household might have a member that could participate in the MCCG. Female-headed households in particular were often categorised as 'very poor', but (social) constraints precluded them from participating in the MCCG. The Social Inclusion Grant thus targeted a community's most vulnerable households by setting up a grain bank, for which eligibility among very poor households was determined by their community (World Bank 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2018c). The Martyrs and Disabled Pension Programme provided one-off or monthly benefits and support with health care, housing and education to PwD. Information was lacking at the time that research on this programme was conducted, but it seemed that the benefits varied by beneficiary group, such as military officials and civil servants, or civilians, also depending on whether disabilities were acquired due to conflict or were congenital (Ministry of Justice 2010b; 2010c; n.d.; Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled n.d.).

Finally, the only social insurance programme identified at the time was the Public Sector Pensions Programme. It offered pensions to civil servants, the military, public bank employees, families of martyrs and PwD, and was the only programme in Afghanistan that functioned as a contributory old-age retirement scheme (Labib 2012). Categorically targeting former public-sector workers in the whole country, the programme granted eligible pensioners monthly retirement payments that were tied to their former salaries and transferred directly into their bank account (Twigg 2018).

If all the mapped information about these programmes is accurate, the large 'missing middle' mentioned earlier comprises everyone who is not affiliated to the civil service or military, does not have a disability and is not classified as poor by their communities. While the first three groups are relatively small according to the data presented in Sections 2 to 4, this study has shown that around half of the population was classified as poor prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only a limited number of beneficiaries classified as the most vulnerable could benefit from the

Social Inclusion Grant and the Women’s Economic Empowerment Rural Development Project. Considering how even those households living above the PL lack adequate living conditions, such as those highlighted by the indicators considered in subsection 4.2, one can infer that the vast majority of the Afghan population would need to benefit from a social protection programme, and that those who are not classified as vulnerable enough to receive a benefit were exposed to multiple risks and dire living conditions.

These dire living conditions are further highlighted by the priorities of the households interviewed for the IE&LF 2020. As Table 37 summarises, government initiatives that could be considered social protection are not often listed as households’ top priorities. Instead, respondents seemed to prioritise drinking water, infrastructure and security. This does not mean that households do not see the need for social protection. Instead, this may imply that the needs for water, adequate infrastructure and security are so pressing that the lack thereof might be one variable undermining households’ access to social protection.

**Table 37. Households’ top priorities for government action**

Type of assistance	Households below the PL	Households above the PL	All households
Improved drinking water	24.5%	18.1%	20.7%
Construction/repair of infrastructure (roads and bridges)	12.2%	9.2%	10.4%
Increased security	10.0%	18.4%	15.0%
Increased employment opportunities	8.6%	10.3%	9.5%
New/improved local health facilities	7.6%	8.8%	8.3%
Electricity provision	6.6%	8.2%	7.5%
Other, specify	7.3%	4.3%	5.6%
Rehabilitation of irrigation system	3.5%	4.2%	3.9%
New/improved local education facilities	6.2%	5.0%	5.6%
Improved agricultural services	2.3%	2.1%	2.2%
New/improved housing in community	1.3%	0.8%	1.0%
Vocational skills training	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Improved veterinary services	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%
Literacy training	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
New/improved microcredit schemes	0.4%	0.2%	0.3%
Disarmament of local militia/commanders	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Local land or housing dispute settlement	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Reformed/improved local justice systems	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

This lack of access to not only adequate public services, such as water and infrastructure, but also to social protection characterised Afghanistan’s vulnerability context prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next subsection elaborates on social protection provision once Sars-Cov-2 reached the country.

## 6.2 Social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Martyrs and Disabled Pension Programme also included the families of deceased health professionals. This was the only COVID-19 response directly linked to a pre-existing social protection programme mapped by the IPC-IG (IPC-IG and UNICEF ROSA 2020).

Further, the World Bank repurposed USD100 million of its funding for the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project<sup>10</sup> to provide cash transfers to about 90 per cent of households under the project. By June 2020, it also temporarily provided in-kind emergency transfers to around 2.7 million households living under the USD2/day poverty line through its REACH programme. In particular, households that did not benefit from the project were targeted (ibid.). While this is not an adaptation of the MCCG or the Social Inclusion Grant, it is linked to the existing (international financial) structure behind the Citizens' Charter National Priority Programme.

Thus, to cope with the COVID-19 crisis, the main social protection response overlapped with humanitarian action. Poor families were given bread under the State-led National Plan for the Distribution of Baked Bread, although the highest reported number of beneficiaries in 2020 was 1.1 million individuals (ibid.). The IPC-IG also mapped several emergency in-kind transfers to internally displaced persons, returnees and poor people, which reached an estimated 290,000 households in 2020. Further, emergency cash transfers primarily to internally displaced persons and returnees were also mapped, but they covered less than 1 per cent of the population in 2020 (ibid.). Other measures mapped in 2020 included exemptions of utility bills, although the target group comprised only civil servants, some private-sector workers and half of Kabul's population (ibid.).

Note that the above-mentioned measures, with the exception of the REACH programme and the repurposing of the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project funding, may only have covered a minor part of the population. This summary of social protection measures does not include humanitarian interventions that were implemented solely by non-state actors (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasise that the majority of the country's population were already extremely vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and probably became even more so prior to August 2021.

At the time of writing, the Taliban takeover is still too recent to enable a proper analysis of what access to social protection looks like in the country. However, based on the vulnerabilities and pre-existing gap in the social protection system and response to the COVID-19 pandemic outlined above, one may state with some certainty that the Taliban regime is taking over the governance of an extremely vulnerable population whose living standards were already in need of drastic improvement.

## 7. DISCUSSION: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Based on the data described above, there are recurring correlations that hint at potential patterns connecting poverty, vulnerability and specific social groups. This section begins by summarising these factors. It then proceeds by proposing demographic factors that should be considered when addressing vulnerability in Afghanistan.

### 7.1 Factors potentially linked to vulnerability

Cautioning that correlation cannot be equated with causation, the following subsection outlines social factors that appear linked to poverty and vulnerability.

First, there seems to be a positive correlation between population youth, age-based and youth dependency ratios and poverty. As such, it looks like households with younger household members, especially children under 14 years, may be more likely to be poor. This is exemplified by the fact that households living below the PL have higher age-based and youth dependency ratios. Further, the presence of children below the age of 14 in a household could be a determinant of poverty because this age group is legally prohibited from joining the labour force, meaning that they

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10. The name of the corresponding World Bank project to fund the Citizens' Charter National Priority Programme.

cannot legally contribute to household income (NSIA and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative 2019; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). However, this is merely speculation, as no causal relationship was evident from the microdata.

What is interesting to note is that old-age and disability dependency ratios are higher among urban households and those living above the PL. This implies that elderly people and PwD are also likely to contribute to household incomes and that members of households with more income may have a longer life expectancy, simultaneously increasing the likelihood of age-related disability (Akseer et al. 2018; Carvalho et al. 2013; Naim et al. 2015; Rasooly et al. 2014). This can also suggest that more affluent households can afford to take care of these two groups.

Further, this needs assessment finds that, already before the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the working population were vulnerable. Only around one third of the population were employed as of early 2020, with activity status not differing much between the populations living above and below the PL. Workers engaged in most types of work also showed similar poverty rates. This suggests that there was a large proportion of working poor people in the country and that employment was not always enough to overcome poverty. Further, as most of the population works in employment types classified here as vulnerable, this also suggests that decent working conditions were already lacking in Afghanistan prior to the pandemic. Thus, it is likely that employment was already not enough to overcome vulnerabilities. Note that, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, urban employment indicators in particular have worsened, as discussed in previous sections (World Bank Group 2021).

The employment types that stood out were day labourers, self-employed people with paid employees, and salaried workers, especially those in the public sector. While the former seemed especially associated with poverty, the latter two seemed the least. Considering the social protection programmes mapped prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, public-sector workers also seem to have enjoyed better working conditions, such as being eligible for old-age pensions (most likely the Public Sector Pensions Programme).

Women seemed to have already been more likely than men to experience multiple employment-related vulnerabilities, although the links between sex and certain forms of deprivation are not always straightforward. First, as seen above, a large proportion of women did not actively participate in the labour force. This may be due to *pardah* norms that dictate that women ought to remain within the private sphere and engage in reproductive labour rather than joining the productive workforce in the public sphere (Ritchie 2016). Second, the employment conditions of women who did work point to other potential factors influencing vulnerability. Most women worked for their families or were self-employed. There might have been a link between norms assigning women to the household and their absence from formal employment, as this would require relationships—albeit professional—with strangers (*ibid.*). At the same time, the existence of such norms and their impact on women and girls aged 14 or older also implies that they could be more difficult to change. If the current Taliban government does not fulfil claims to repeal the exclusion of women from public spaces, this may become an even more arduous endeavour (Al Jazeera 2022; UNDP Afghanistan 2021).

Women and girls already showed worse education indicators, although they were generally bad for the entire population. Literacy rates were low among men, boys, women and girls. Similarly, as seen above, a large proportion of the general population has never attended school. While education indicators were improving among younger age groups before the pandemic and the Taliban takeover, women and girls always had less access to education, also resulting in lower literacy rates. Similar to findings on employment, this limited access to education may be linked to social norms that exclude women and girls from public spaces (Ritchie 2016). Note that, as UNDP Afghanistan (2021) found, the Taliban are deepening this exclusion of women and girls, which, if left unchanged, may further worsen female education and labour force participation.

Individuals also seem to face vulnerabilities due to their geographic location (Akseer et al. 2018; Burde and Linden 2012; Carvalho et al. 2013; Kantor and Pain 2012; Pain and Kantor 2012). Urban populations showed lower poverty

rates, which were highest among the Kuchi. Further, while inactivity was lowest and employment highest among the Kuchi population, this population worked predominantly in vulnerable employment conditions, including a third of Kuchi workers doing unpaid family work. On the other hand, the urban population showed the highest inactivity but lowest employment rates. Urban inactivity, especially associated with a lack of female labour force participation, could be linked to an increased ability of more affluent households to uphold gender norms. However, the already low rates of urban employment are likely to have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and urban populations also experience poverty and other deprivations, as explained in previous sections (World Bank Group 2021).

While education indicators were low among the general population, they were worst among the Kuchi population and best among the urban population. Educational attainment may influence a variety of living standard indicators, such as mortality—which seems higher in rural and Kuchi areas, given how young these populations are—and employment (Carvalho et al. 2013; Kumar and Fernandez 2016; Naim et al. 2015; Rasooly et al. 2014).

Further, around seven in ten of Afghanistan's households reportedly faced shocks in the year preceding the IE&LF 2020. However, almost 70 per cent of those households did not do anything to cope with those shocks. This information suggests that a majority of Afghans are not included in Afghanistan's social protection system, regardless of programme type. As discussed in Section 5, a reason for this may be the absence of necessary infrastructure to provide and access social protection, and security concerns that hinder people from accessing the programmes available. Further, as explained in Section 6, the State-led social protection system only targeted either the most vulnerable or the comparatively advantaged segments of the population prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from Section 5 suggest that the 'missing middle' not benefiting from any social protection programme offered by the State may have been already extremely large before the pandemic.

Finally, while the next subsection highlights which demographic groups seem most linked to the above-mentioned vulnerabilities, it is crucial to keep in mind how vulnerability often did not differ significantly between those living above and below the national PL prior to the pandemic. Alongside poor working conditions mentioned earlier, this also implies that there was already a substantial segment of marginally non-poor Afghans who faced similar vulnerabilities—if not the same—as those classified as poor. This is exemplified not just by their similar employment status and vulnerable types of work, but also inadequate living conditions, as shown in subsection 4.2.

## 7.2 Demographic context of vulnerability

Afghanistan's population is relatively young and predominantly resides in rural areas. This is a major demographic factor to be considered. The number of children aged 6–14 years implies that a large share of the population are officially obliged to attend school and are not allowed to join the active labour force (Ministry of Education 2016; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF 2018). Further, a large proportion of the national population are children below school age. This means that a large segment of the population finds itself at an important stage of development. As such, this group requires particular attention from policymakers, as social policies targeting them are likely to impact them in the long run (Chan et al. 2017; Daelmans et al. 2017; Machel 2017; UNICEF 2017). Finally, as mentioned above, the presence of children below the age of 14 in households seems to be associated with higher poverty rates. Regarding elderly people and PwD, on the other hand, the data suggest that their presence in households is more likely to be associated with living above the PL than under it. However, considering that living conditions do not differ significantly between poor and non-poor households, this is not to say that elderly people and PwD enjoy above-average living standards.

Further, the populations in urban, rural and Kuchi areas are not equally exposed to vulnerabilities. As highlighted above, the Kuchi population are more vulnerable than urban and rural populations. While vulnerabilities are still highly prevalent among the other two groups, urban residents seemed to enjoy higher living standards at least prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the onset of COVID-19, it seems that urban living standards have also decreased,



especially due to poverty caused by livelihood losses (World Bank Group 2021). While most people in Afghanistan live in rural areas, differences between provinces must be considered (Akseer et al. 2018; Burde and Linden 2012; Kantor and Pain 2012; Kumar and Fernandez 2016; Pain and Kantor 2012).

Women also stand out as having already been in a more precarious situation than men prior to the pandemic. Their exclusion from public affairs due to social norms might be linked to affluence in a rather complex manner. The microdata do not provide enough information to further investigate determinants of Afghan women's labour force participation prior to August 2021. Yet this needs assessment has found that the difference in labour force participation between poor and non-poor women is not particularly large, based on the national PL. Rather, a larger difference was identified between urban, rural and Kuchi women. Nevertheless, women excluded from work and education are incredibly vulnerable, as they are not only more exposed to dependence on male family members but also to other risks, as, for example, low education is also associated with worse health outcomes, according to the general literature (Taufik et al. 2016).

Adequate data on vulnerabilities were already hard to find. After the COVID-19 pandemic and the Taliban takeover, one may expect that especially the vulnerabilities related to employment, gender, health and education will have deepened (UNDP Afghanistan 2021; World Bank Group 2021). It is imperative that decision makers bring Afghanistan back onto its pre-COVID development path and improve from there.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Retirement ages in Afghanistan

Position/rank	Statutory retirement requirements	Earliest possible retirement requirements
Civil servants	65 years old OR 40 years of regular service OR 'self-willingness' OR Disability/long-term health condition OR Conditions similar to suspension/ resignation/end of paid leave	55 years old AND 25 years of regular service
Low-ranked officers and <i>Bridmalan/Satanmanan</i>	52 years old OR 25 years of regular service	
High-ranked officers and <i>Bridmalan/Satanmanan</i>	60 years old OR 37 years of regular service	
Brigadier-General, Major-General, Lieutenant-General	65 years old OR 40 years of regular service	Acquired disability off-duty and at least 1 year of service
Four Star General	70 years old OR 40 years of regular service	
Youth officers	52 years old OR 30 years of regular service	

Source: Ministry of Justice (2010a; 2009).

## Annex 2: Population in provinces

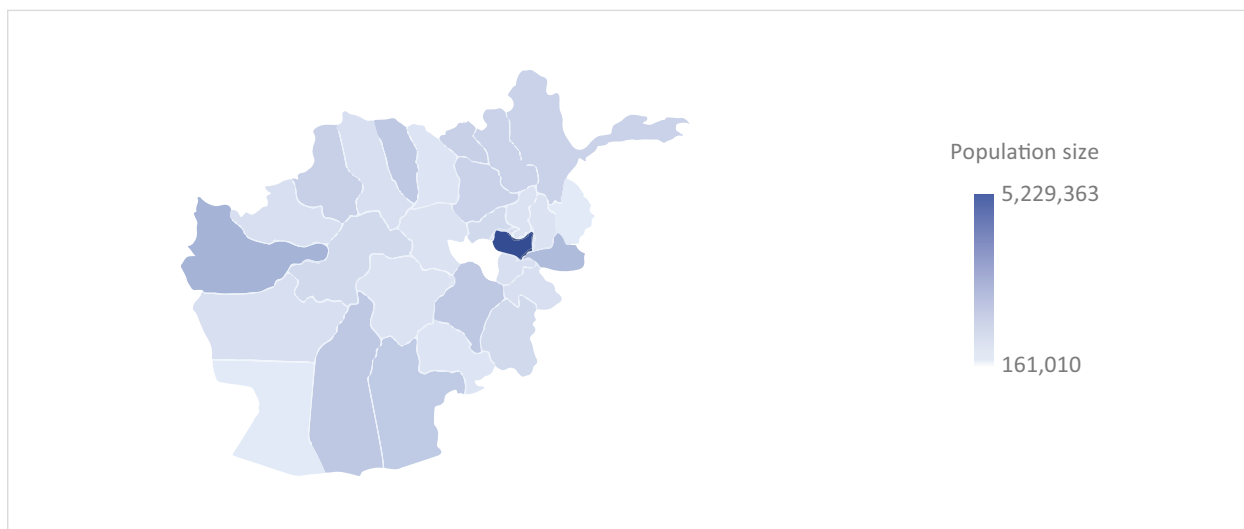
Distribution of Afghanistan's population by province, including map:

**Table 38.** Distribution of Afghanistan's population by province

Province	Number	Percentage
Kabul	5,229,363	16.25
Kapisa	479,700	1.49
Parwan	765,763	2.38
Maydan Wodakg	758,009	2.36
Logar	662,115	2.06
Nangarhar	1,878,739	5.84
Laghman	524,883	1.63
Panjsher	184,632	0.57
Baghlan	995,892	3.09
Bamyan	486,735	1.51
Ghazni	1,422,252	4.42
Paktika	791,525	2.46
Paktya	628,506	1.95
Khost	625,792	1.94
Kunarha	490,859	1.53
Nooristan	161,010	0.5
Badakhshan	1,079,086	3.35
Takhar	1,073,051	3.33
Kunduz	1,113,953	3.46
Samangan	422,783	1.31
Balkh	1,503,668	4.67
Sar-E-Pul	634,692	1.97
Ghor	820,670	2.55
Daykundi	507,574	1.58
Urozgan	488,143	1.52
Zabul	410,081	1.27
Kandahar	1,368,044	4.25
Jawzjan	590,588	1.84
Faryab	1,140,723	3.54
Helmand	1,420,854	4.42
Badghis	598,324	1.86
Herat	2,162,510	6.72
Farah	580,322	1.8
Nimroz	180,229	0.56

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Figure 30.** Population distribution by province (map based on Table 38)



Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 39.** Population by province, disaggregated by sex

Province	Male	Female	Total
Kabul	2,687,780	2,541,583	5,229,363
Kapisa	239,461	240,239	479,700
Parwan	387,684	378,079	765,763
Maydan Wodakg	386,038	371,971	758,009
Logar	342,882	319,233	662,115
Nangarhar	952,586	926,153	1,878,739
Laghman	270,339	254,544	524,883
Panjsher	95,976	88,656	184,632
Baghlan	497,440	498,452	995,892
Bamyan	249,445	237,290	486,735
Ghazni	757,693	664,559	1,422,252
Paktika	421,382	370,143	791,525
Paktya	329,631	298,875	628,506
Khost	320,431	305,361	625,792
Kunarha	254,171	236,688	490,859
Nooristan	81,811	79,199	161,010
Badakhshan	538,174	540,912	1,079,086
Takhar	533,405	539,646	1,073,051
Kunduz	553,055	560,898	1,113,953
Samangan	218,027	204,756	422,783
Balkh	749,855	753,813	1,503,668
Sar-e-pul	331,952	302,740	634,692
Ghor	410,133	410,537	820,670
Daykundi	254,494	253,080	507,574
Urozgan	223,291	264,852	488,143
Zabul	230,306	179,775	410,081
Kandahar	708,350	659,694	1,368,044
Jawzjan	308,533	282,055	590,588



Province	Male	Female	Total
Faryab	526,353	614,370	1,140,723
Helmand	719,052	701,802	1,420,854
Badghis	301,332	296,992	598,324
Herat	1,121,601	1,040,909	2,162,510
Farah	304,790	275,532	580,322
Nimroz	90,352	89,877	180,229
Total	16,397,805	15,783,265	32,181,070

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

**Table 40. Urban, rural and Kuchi populations, by province**

Province	Urban	Rural	Kuchi
Kabul	82.2%	14.0%	3.8%
Kapisa	0.3%	99.7%	0.0%
Parwan	8.7%	86.0%	5.4%
Maydan Wodakg	0.5%	85.1%	14.4%
Logar	1.7%	62.8%	35.5%
Nangarhar	14.3%	74.5%	11.2%
Laghman	1.1%	91.3%	7.6%
Panjsher	0.0%	90.7%	9.3%
Baghlan	20.7%	79.3%	0.0%
Bamyan	3.0%	97.0%	0.0%
Ghazni	4.7%	89.4%	5.9%
Paktika	0.0%	95.7%	4.3%
Paktya	4.4%	91.3%	4.3%
Khost	2.1%	97.9%	0.0%
Kunarha	3.2%	96.8%	0.0%
Nooristan	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Badakhshan	3.9%	92.1%	4.0%
Takhar	13.5%	86.5%	0.0%
Kunduz	26.5%	73.5%	0.0%
Samangan	7.8%	92.2%	0.0%
Balkh	37.7%	60.4%	1.9%
Sar-e-pul	7.7%	88.4%	3.9%
Ghor	1.0%	90.6%	8.5%
Daykundi	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Urozgan	3.2%	84.6%	12.2%
Zabul	3.1%	89.0%	7.9%
Kandahar	37.0%	63.0%	0.0%
Jawzjan	22.0%	78.0%	0.0%
Faryab	12.0%	83.5%	4.5%
Helmand	6.9%	93.1%	0.0%
Badghis	2.8%	87.5%	9.7%
Herat	29.2%	67.7%	3.1%
Farah	7.2%	88.1%	4.7%
Nimroz	16.5%	83.5%	0.0%

Source: IE&LF 2020 (NSIA 2021a).

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