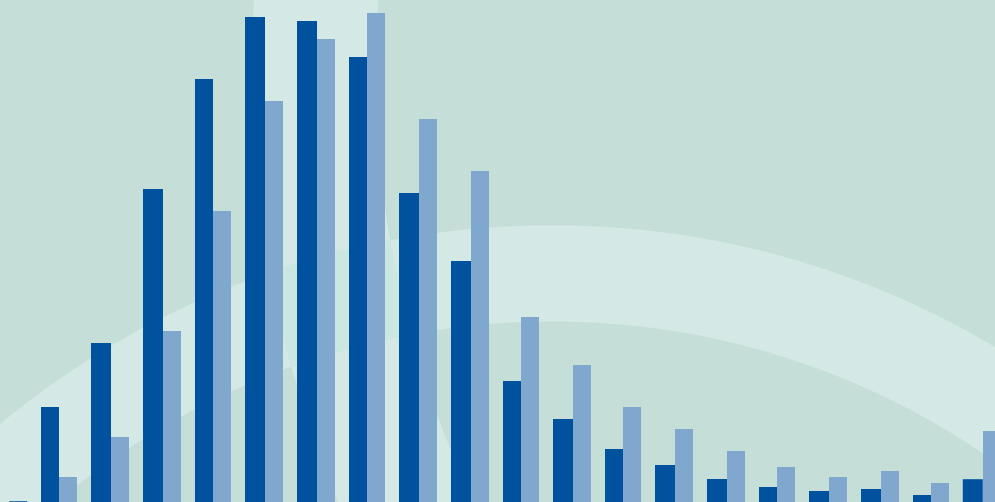


SUMMARY OF THE

# National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8

A profile of Afghanistan



European  
Union



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## Introduction

Kabul, October 2009 – Nearly every second Afghan citizen is under 15 years of age – in numbers: 12 million or 49 percent of the population. Also, more than one out of three Afghans – some 9 million people or 36 percent of the population – lives in absolute poverty and cannot meet his or her basic needs. On the positive side, the proportion of primary-school age children that is attending school has increased from only 37 to 52 percent in just over two years time. These are only a few of the numerous figures of the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/8 conducted by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The assessment is based on statistical data collected during a one-year period from August 2007 through August 2008 – making it the most extensive statistical venture of its kind in Afghanistan. 156 enumerators were involved, male and female interviewers travelled to 395 districts in 34 provinces, collected data from more than 20,000 households with over 152,000 Afghan citizens.

Afghanistan is facing fundamental economic and social change. To measure progress in social and economic development, as well as in poverty reduction, it is imperative that the Government of Afghanistan has access to information on the social and economic situation of the population. This information will serve to assist the government in adapting policy to changing socio-economic conditions, and allow it to monitor the impact of such policies on the more vulnerable groups in the country and on the country as a whole.

The NRVA as it stands today is the only comprehensive nation-wide multi-purpose household survey in Afghanistan, enabling a large amount of cross-section analysis. The present 2007/8 NRVA is the third of three successive rounds of surveys, following NRVA 2003 and 2005. The NRVA 2003 survey was carried out with co-operation of the World Food Programme (WFP) and supported by the Vulnerability Analysis Unit (VAU) of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. The second NRVA survey was launched in 2005, with CSO and MRRD as the implementing agencies. The NRVA 2005 was a significant improvement in terms of sample design and coverage.

As a follow-up to the first two surveys, the third NRVA survey was launched in 2007, jointly by MRRD and CSO, and with co-operation and funding from the European Commission. The NRVA 2007/8 was based on a smaller sample of 20,576 households, but with further improvements in the questionnaire, sample design and coverage. It was designed to provide the government and other agencies with more robust and up-to-date socio-economic data.

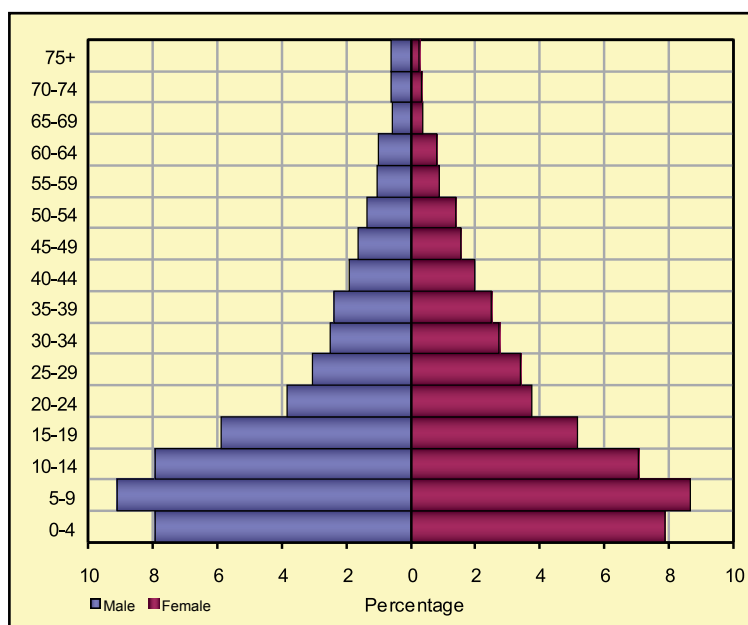
This brochure provides a summarized overview to the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8. It collects several important findings and delivers some background information. It also helps to interpret complicated contexts – but it does not claim to cover all facts and data, which are collected and compiled in the NRVA 2007/8 main report. The individual reader with certain fields of interests and requests is advised to look for more information in the specific chapters of this report and in the large amount of predefined tables on the website of CSO '[www.nrva.cso.gov.af](http://www.nrva.cso.gov.af)' to serve the more advanced user. The assessment has 12 chapters, which cover the fields: population structure and change, labour force characteristics, agriculture, poverty, education, health, housing, position of women, household shocks and community preferences and recommendations.

## Population structure and change

The population size of Afghanistan estimated on the basis of the NRVA sampling procedure is close to 25 million people. The most striking feature of the Afghan population is its very young age structure. Some 49 percent (12 million) is under 15 years of age, whereas elderly of 65 and over represent less than three percent of the total population. The proportion under 15 is among the very highest in the world and significantly higher than that of neighbouring countries, ranging from 26 percent in Iran to around 39 percent in Pakistan and Tajikistan. Some of the most urgent issues documented by the NRVA 2007/8 are resulting from Afghanistan's rapid population growth, continuous very high fertility and significant immigration in recent years. With a population numerically dominated by children and a Total Fertility Rate of 6.3 children per woman the country is confronted with significant economic and social challenges. High fertility not only has adverse effects to the health of mothers and children, it also reduces female access to education, gainful employment and other personal development opportunities. The determinants and compounding factors of high fertility are many, but generally include poor health services (especially related to provision of and information about family planning), limited knowledge of contraceptive methods, low contraceptive prevalence, high child mortality, low education and limited empowerment of women. The NRVA findings show a worryingly high infant mortality rate of 111 and under-five mortality rate of 161 per thousand live births. However, there are signs of improvement in recent years: the NRVA 2007/8 suggests that fertility rates have declined in the last three years across all age categories. With respect to infant mortality, it suggests a 33 percent decline since 2001.

Overall Afghanistan faces a high and increasing demand for education, health services, basic infrastructure and jobs. Sectoral development planning will have to take these perspectives into account. This prognosis also emphasizes the need of a comprehensive population policy addressing the high levels of fertility and child mortality. For a well-founded population policy and for development planning, a Demographic and Health Survey and a full population census are badly needed.

*Figure 1 Population, by age and sex (in percentages)*



The total number of households in Afghanistan is estimated at around 3.4 million. This implies an average household size of 7.3 persons. The large majority of households (73 percent) have 4 to 9 members. Around 19 percent (some 650 thousand households) accommodate 10 or more people, and only eight percent have three or less persons. In the Afghan context, the absence of a male head of household can signify a highly vulnerable position of the household members in terms of income security and social protection. In total there are 70 thousand female-headed households in Afghanistan.

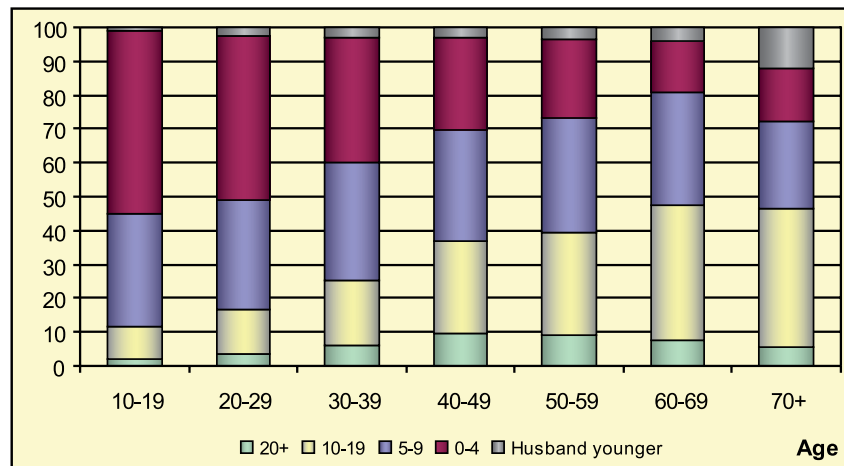
In addition to natural increase, Afghanistan's population has substantially grown due to returning refugees, predominantly from Pakistan and Iran. It is likely that additional immigration is also a factor of population growth, with Iran being the leading country of origin and destination of migrants. By far the most important reason for international migration today is employment. This indicates the relatively weak labour market situation in Afghanistan, as well as the economic importance

of labour migration for the country's economy. As a consequence of many years of war and civil unrest, a considerable number of people have fled once or repeatedly. In recent years, large numbers of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have started to return or have resettled elsewhere in Afghanistan. When asked, 60 percent of all households report that this large influx of refugees has affected them negatively during the past year, whether directly or indirectly. There is no doubt that large-scale international migration – including consecutive massive waves of refugees and, more recently, returnees – made a significant impact on the overall size and structure of the population. In terms of numbers, internal migration is even larger than international migration.

Marital status is a key principle in the social relations in Afghan society. Marriage is a universal phenomenon in Afghanistan and is characterized by early marriage for women, with a mean age at first marriage of 17.9. On average husbands are nearly 7 years older than their wives. While divorce and separation are practically invisible in the marital status distribution, the incidence of widowhood increases with age, especially for women. Afghanistan has around 135 thousand widowers, but considerably more than half a million widows. The two major causes of this large number of widows are high male mortality in the last three decades of conflict in Afghanistan and large age differences between spouses. Irrespective of the cause, widowed women can be classified as being in a vulnerable position.

The NRVA findings include a noticeable decline of early marriages and a steady drop in the spousal age difference in recent years. These developments can be expected to have positive effects on women's health and empowerment.

**Figure 2 Spousal age difference, by current age of wife**



The Afghan population is overwhelmingly rural: 74 percent (around 18.5 million people) live in rural areas and only 20 percent (5.0 million) in urban areas, whereas six percent (1.5 million) belong to nomadic Kuchi. A full picture, and the possibility to produce population growth rates and population projections, is not possible as of yet, because of the absence of adult mortality indicators, life expectancy estimates and more adequate migration information.

**Population structure at a glance**

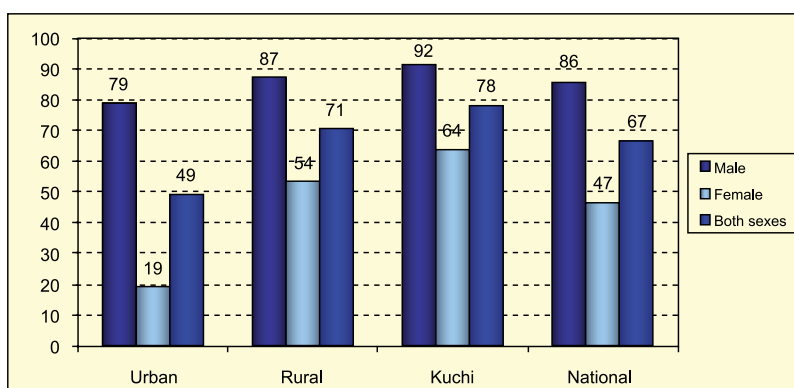
- Population size around 25 million
- Rapid population growth
- Half the population under the age of 15
- Very high Total Fertility Rate of 6.3 children per woman
- Very high infant mortality (111 per thousand live births) and under-five mortality (161)
- Significant immigration (including refugees)
- Total number of households around 3.4 million
- Average household size of 7.3 persons
- Marriage is an almost universal phenomenon
- Women's mean age at first marriage: 17.9 years
- More than half a million widows
- Population is overwhelmingly rural (74 percent)

## Labour force characteristics

Afghanistan's labour market has the typical characteristics of a less developed economy: it is dominated by the agricultural sector and performs poorly in providing decent work, reflected in productive employment, secure income, gender equality and social protection. More than 90 percent of jobs can be classified as vulnerable employment that does not secure stable and sufficient income.

Due to the very large share of children, less than half of the Afghan population is in the official working age of 16 years and over. Within this working-age population of over 12 million people, one-third (four million) is inactive and two-thirds (8 million) are currently actively engaged in the labour market, either by working or looking for work. The corresponding labour force participation rate – being an important indicator of available human resources; calculated as the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market – is a relatively high 67 percent. In the context of Afghanistan this might indicate that many people are compelled to find work for bare household survival. High labour force participation is found in rural areas and among Kuchis (see Figure 3). This is typical for less developed economies, in which educational opportunities are few, where most people are engaged in labour-intensive agricultural activities, and where wage earning opportunities are scarce, so that many household members need to work to provide sufficient income. The NRVA figures also indicate a clear gender disparity in the labour market, with 5.3 million male and 2.8 million female labour force.

*Figure 3 Labour force participation rate, by residence and by sex*



The related indicator that specifies the proportion of an economy's working-age population that is actually employed is fairly high at 62 percent (Table 1). At the same time, the unemployment rate is only a modest 7 percent. These figures should also be interpreted in the sense that people simply cannot afford to be unemployed, and they are likely to indicate high levels of underemployment. The total number of unemployed consists of 363 thousand males and 205 thousand females.

*Table 1 Employment-to-population ratio and unemployment rate, by sex, and by residence*

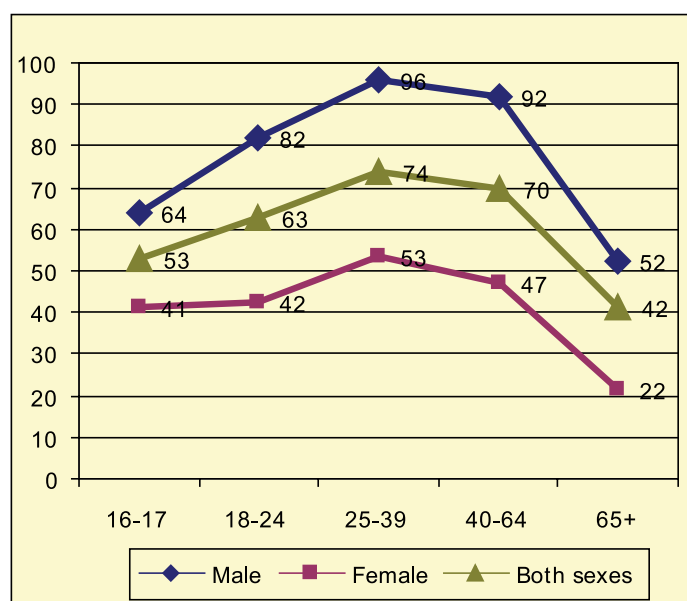
Residence	Employment-to-population ratio, sex			Unemployment rate, sex		
	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
Urban	72	16	44	9	18	11
Rural	82	50	66	7	7	7
Kuchi	88	61	75	4	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

## Women

The overall labour force participation rate of 67 percent in Afghanistan conceals large differences by sex and age. Although generally labour force participation is lower for females than for males, in the Afghan economy this gender gap is large. Less than half (47 percent) of the working-age females is currently active on the labour market, against 86 percent of males, a gap of 39 percent points. The gap is relatively small in the rural and Kuchi populations (respectively 34 and 28 percent points), due to female engagement in agricultural and pastoral activities. However, in urban areas the gap is as large as 60 percent points because of a very low female labour force participation of 21 percent. Generally, women do not only work less often than men, but those who do also work for less hours and in less secure jobs.

The low female participation rates indicate that women are still a significant untapped potential in the country. Underlying causes are a variety of competing demands and barriers for women, such as their care-taking responsibility for children, elderly and the disabled, frequent pregnancies, household chores, low educational attainment and restricted mobility. These conditions determine the large gender gaps at all age levels. The largest gender gap of 45 percent points is found in the age group 40-64.

Figure 4 Labour force participation rate, by sex and age



## Children

Widespread poverty and inadequate educational opportunities drive many households to send their children looking for work. In total 1.9 million Afghan children aged 6-17 (21 percent) are employed. According to the formal definition of child labour, of these children at least 1.2 million (13 percent) are performing child labour. This high prevalence demands strong government policy and interventions to protect the health and development of Afghan children. Providing adequate education is a prominent strategy in this respect.

## Labour migration

Widespread poverty and a lack of income-generating opportunities drive many Afghans to go and look for work elsewhere. The importance of this strategy is indicated by the fact that 7 percent of all households have a labour in-migrant, 6 percent saw a member leave for work elsewhere and 14 percent had seasonal labour migrants. Labour migration is an almost exclusively male phenomenon: 94 percent of labour in-migrants and 98 percent of labour out-migrants are men. A (returning) labour in-migrant as defined here is someone who has moved to the current place of residence some time during the past five years and whose original reason for moving away was work-related. A labour out-migrant has moved away from the present household during the past year in order to go and (look for) work elsewhere.

**Table 2 Place of origin of labour in-migrants and place of destination of labour out-migrants**

Place of origin / destination	In-migrants		Out-migrants	
	Thousands	Percentages	Thousands	Percentages
Urban - Afghanistan	101	23	23	9
Rural - Afghanistan	98	22	10	4
Pakistan	34	8	11	4
Iran	205	46	169	67
Arabian Peninsula	2	0	31	12
Other countries	3	1	10	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>100</b>

For international labour migration, Iran is by far the most important origin and destination of labour migrants (Table 2). Mean duration of residence abroad is 16 months, with most returning labour migrants (61 percent) staying abroad between 6-23 months. Most of the labour migration within Afghanistan is interprovincial, whether rural or urban in origin.

**Labour force characteristics at a glance**

- Working-age population (age of 16 and older): 12 million
- Labour force (employed or looking for work): 8 million
- Unemployment rate: 7 percent
- Total number of unemployed: 363 thousand males, 205 thousand females
- 47 percent of the working-age females are active on the labour market
- 86 percent of working-age men are active on the labour market
- 1.9 million Afghan children aged 6-17 (21 percent) are employed
- 1.2 million (13 percent) children are performing child labour
- 443 thousands in-migrants and 254 thousands out-migrants looked for work elsewhere
- Iran is by far the most important origin and destination of Afghan labour migrants



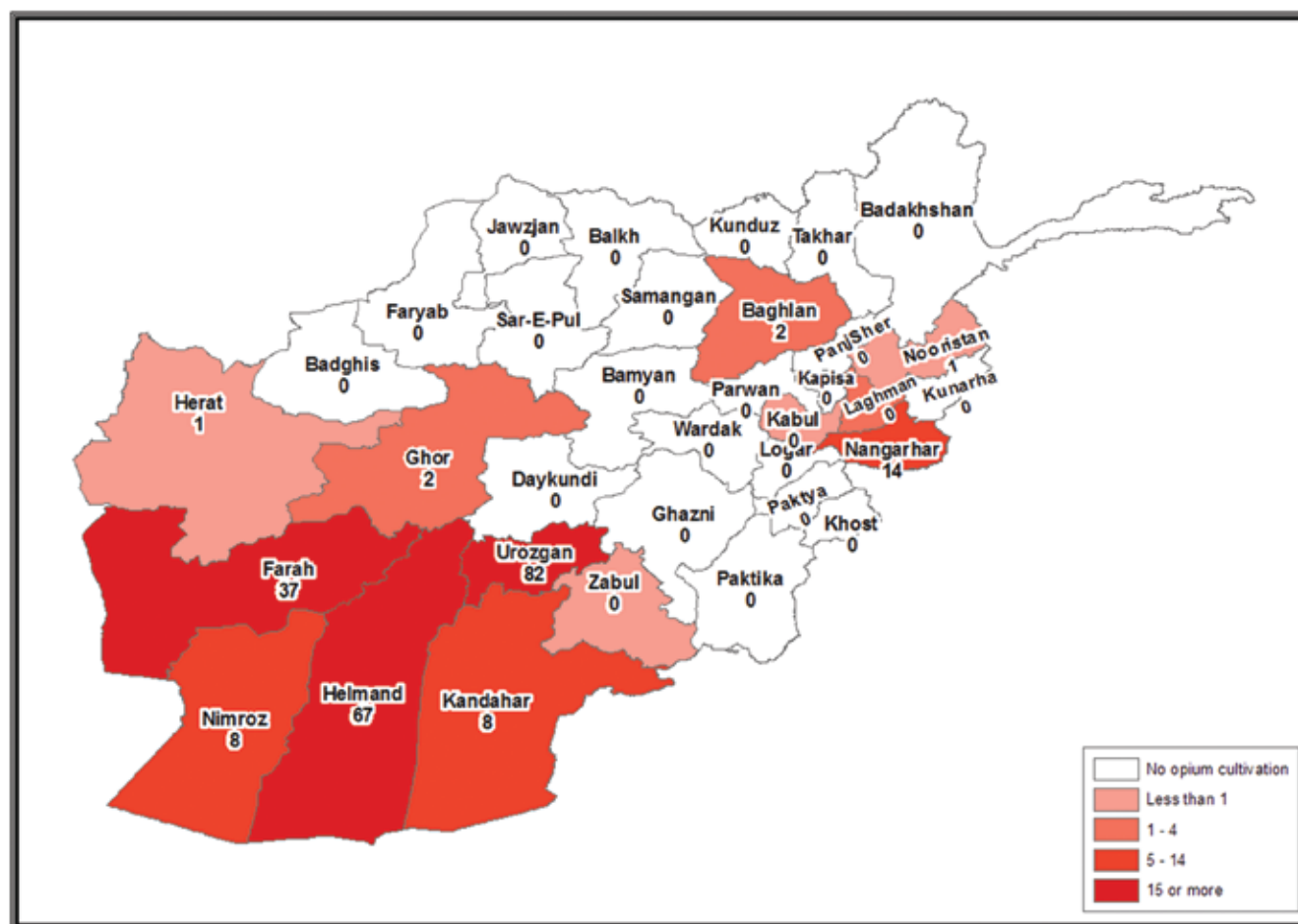
Wheat is the main staple food in Afghanistan and by far the most important crop produced on rain-fed land and irrigated land in summer (Table 4).

**Table 4 Three most important crops of households cultivating irrigated land in summer, irrigated land in winter, rain-fed land and garden plots**

Percentage mentioned	Irrigated land in summer	Irrigated land in winter	Rain-fed land	Garden plots
Most	Wheat (77)	Maize/ sorghum (53)	Wheat (94)	Fruit / nut trees (39)
Second most	Opium (12)	Rice (15)	Cotton (1)	Grapes (33)
Third most	Potatoes (3)	Other (10)	Barley (1)	Other (15)

An alarming result is that 10 percent of households that are engaged in agriculture are growing opium. The NRVA 2007/8 shows opium production in 13 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan, but the national figure can almost exclusively be attributed to the production in six provinces, with Urozgan and Helmand having the highest proportion of households producing opium (82 and 67 percent, respectively). Poppy cultivation is reported by 6 percent of all households and it is the main crop of 12 percent of households using irrigated land in summer (see Table 4). This figure implies a significant increase from the corresponding 3 percent reported in the NRVA 2005. Since poppy cultivation is illegal, it can be expected that these figures represent a significant under-estimation.

**Figure 6 Percentage of households reporting being involved in opium cultivation, by province**



Nearly two thirds (62 percent) of households who reported cultivation in the last summer season (mainly rural households) used fertilizers. Only 17 percent of cultivating households used pesticides and/or herbicides in the last summer season, which might adversely affect agriculture production in the country. Limited use of pesticide and herbicide may be due to lack of access and knowledge. In this regard, improvement of agricultural services may supply an important need. Presently, only 10 percent of farming households receive information on agricultural production, and only 15 percent of households with livestock obtained veterinary services.

Productivity in the agricultural sector is relatively low, as for instance reflected by the 37 percent contribution of agriculture to the GDP. In general, farmland size in Afghanistan is small – 7 Jerib for irrigated land and 14 Jerib for rain-fed land – and productivity is hampered by water shortage (due to poor irrigation systems and lack of rain water), lack of credit, little mechanization, insufficient outreach of agricultural and veterinary extension services, and poor accessibility of markets and communities. However, with regard to the latter, the NRVA 2007/8 observed that more than half of the households mention that road conditions have improved over the three years preceding the interview.

#### **The agricultural sector at a glance**

- 55 percent of households are engaged in farming
- The proportion of households with access to irrigated land, rain-fed land and garden plots is, respectively 40, 17 and 11 percent
- 68 percent of households have any type of livestock
- Wheat is the main staple food produced in the agricultural sector
- Opium is the most important crop for 12 percent of households that use irrigated land
- The provinces Urozgan and Helmand are leading in opium production
- Agricultural production services and veterinary information services are used by 10 and 15 percent of the respective target groups
- Lack of water is the main reason for leaving fallow rain-fed land (37 percent) and irrigated land (65 percent)

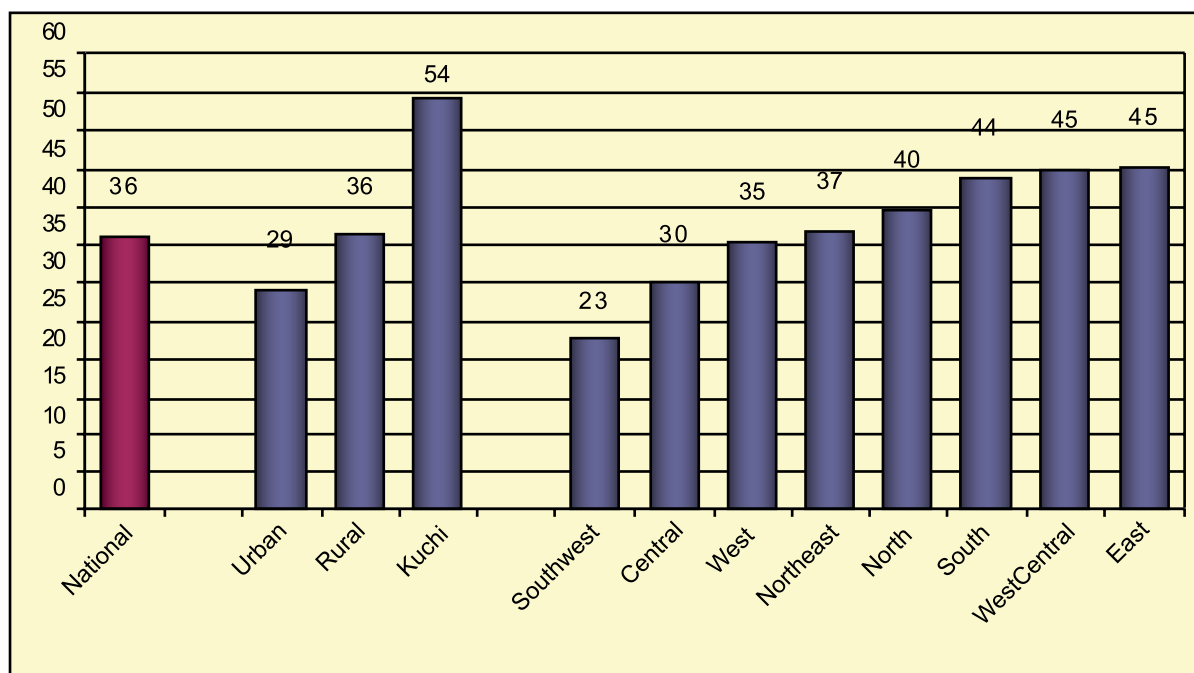
## Poverty incidence and poverty profiling

The measurement of poverty, its geographic distribution, its evolution in time and its relation to key demographic and socio-economic variables are critical to understand the causes and consequences of material deprivation, design effective poverty reduction policies – such as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) – and monitor the progress towards higher levels of material well-being. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and accordingly there is a wide variety of approaches to its measurement. Conventionally poverty has been defined in terms of income or expenditure based on the assumption that persons' material standard of living largely determines their well-being. The poor are then identified as those with a material standard of living below a certain level. The analysis in this chapter follows the method advocated by the World Bank and is based on the so-called Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach.

The overall headcount rate for Afghanistan is estimated at 36 percent of the total population and indicates that some 9 million Afghans are not able to meet their basic needs. Moreover, a large share of the population has a consumption level that is only little above the poverty threshold, implying that they are vulnerable to falling into poverty with small adverse shifts in their livelihoods. Average per-capita monthly consumption expenditure of poor Afghans is only 950 Afs, but the corresponding figure for the non-poor is still only less than 2,100 Afs. The cost of eliminating poverty by bringing the consumption expenditure of all poor people up to the poverty threshold is estimated at around 28.4 billion Afs., approximately 570 million USD in 2007 prices.

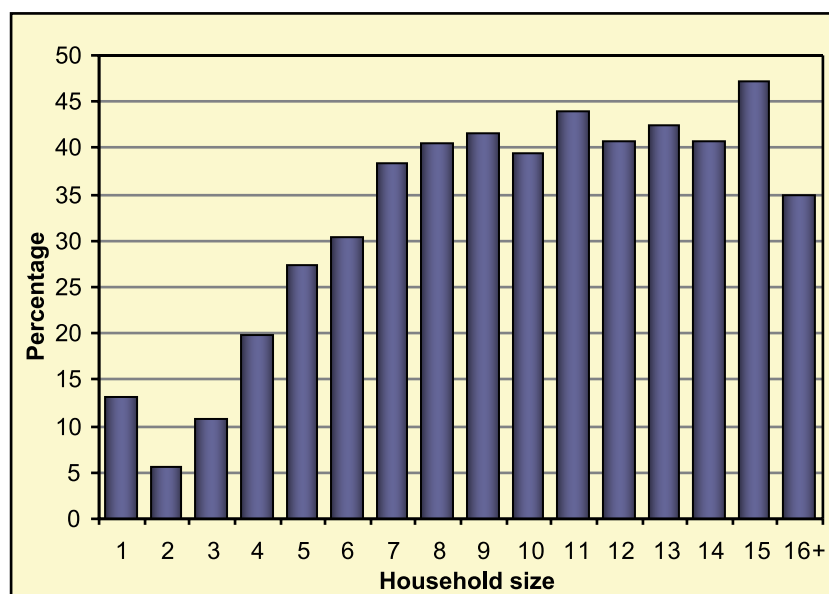
Poverty in the rural population is close to the national average, the incidence in the urban population is relatively low (29 percent) and in the Kuchi population very high (54 percent). The corresponding figures for major regions range from 23 percent in Southwest to 45 percent in East and West-Central. The apparent pattern is that poverty incidence is high in any part of the country.

*Figure 7 Poverty headcount rate, by residence and major region*



There is an apparent correlation between poverty and household size. Overall, the average size of poor households is 8.0 persons, compared to 6.9 for non-poor households. Figure 8 shows that the proportion of poor households is progressively higher for households with more members up to household size nine, which is likely caused by the increase in number of dependents. In larger households the effect is levelling off – possibly by additional adult members that might be engaged in income generating.

**Figure 8 Percentage of poor households, by household size**



On average, poverty is more widespread in the rare cases that households are female-headed than in male-headed households (38 versus 33 percent). Underlying factors could be that women have less access to the labour market for employment or that widows lack the support of a partner for income generating.

Households of illiterate heads are more likely to be poor than those of literate heads (35 versus 27 percent), and the household poverty rate decreases steadily with higher levels of education. This may suggest that educational attainment – and more particularly secondary school attainment – is likely to provide opportunities to escape from poverty.

Child labour and seasonal migration are coping strategies that seem particularly to be employed by poor households. Net primary and secondary enrolment of poor children (50 and 13 percent, respectively) is lower or substantially lower than that of non-poor children (respectively, 53 and 18 percent).

A breakdown of household by access to land reveals that the lowest proportion of poor households (26 percent) is found among those that own land and the highest (42 percent) among those that do not own land themselves, but have access only through renting, sharecropping or mortgaging land.

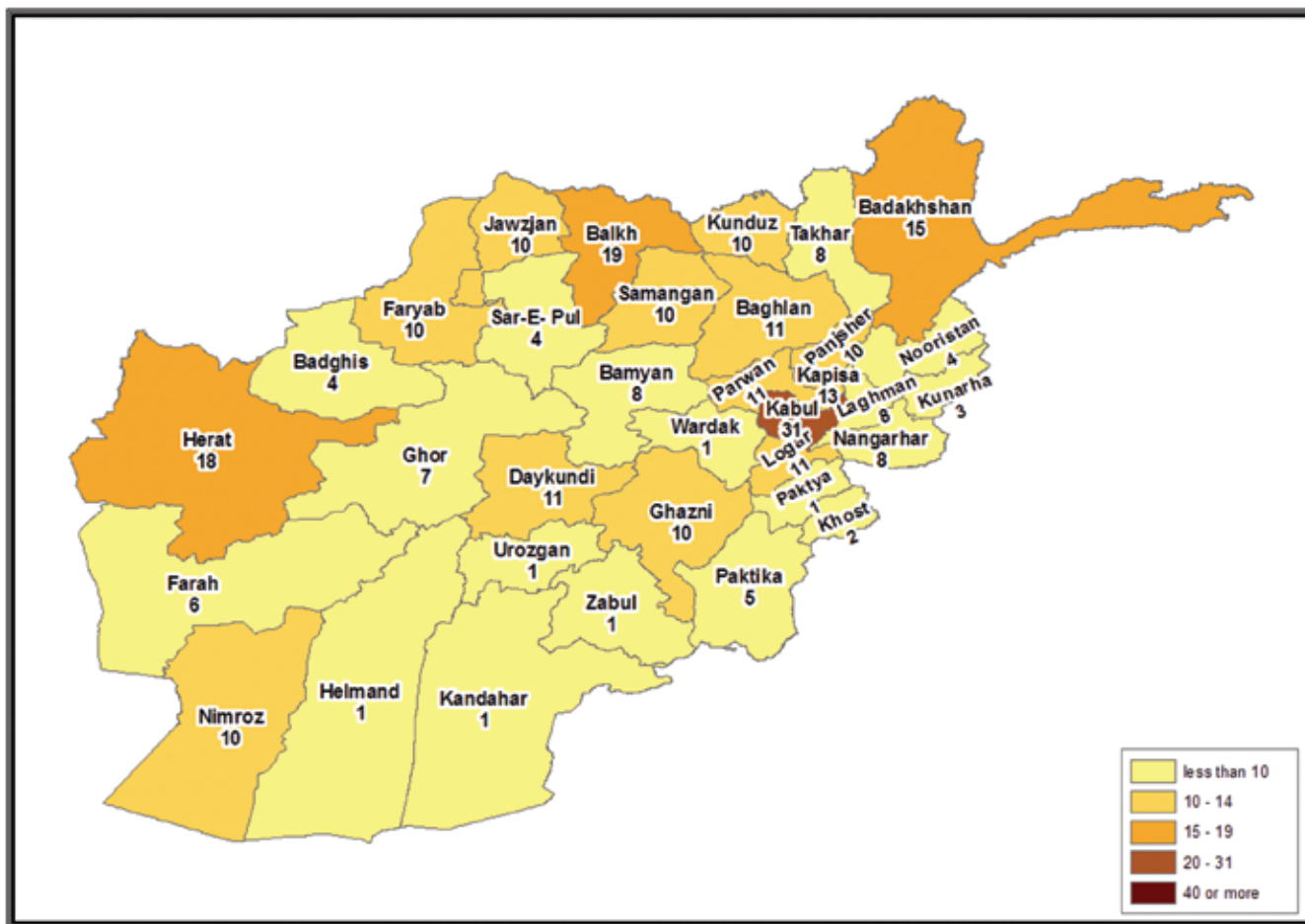
The face of poverty is furthermore revealed in poor access to basic services like safe drinking water, improved sanitation and electricity.

**Poverty incidence and poverty profiling at a glance**

- 9 million Afghans are not able to meet their basic needs (36 percent of population)
- The highest poverty is among the Kuchi population (54 percent), followed by rural and urban population (36 and 29 percent)
- Average size of poor households is 8.0 persons, compared to 6.9 for non-poor households
- Poverty is more widespread in female-headed households
- Households of illiterate heads are 8 percent points more likely to be poor than those of literate heads
- The proportion of poor households among those that own land is 26 percent; for households that rent, sharecrop or mortgage land the poverty incidence is 42 percent.



Figure 9b Female literacy rates, by province



It is the task of the Afghan government to further expand educational opportunities for the new generations. This will become increasingly hard since underserved areas – especially rural areas – are usually the ones that are more difficult to penetrate with development programmes. In addition, the very high population growth will provide ever larger numbers of school-age children in the near future.

Besides a focus on rural and Kuchi populations, education policy needs to further emphasize learning opportunities for girls. Not only because of equity principles, but also to be able to tap their potential for national development. Policy and programme development should take notice of the reasons mentioned for not attending schools. Distance and access issues, as well as financial obstacles should be addressed, but also cultural barriers for girls. Levelling the latter would imply building support in the communities and, for instance, training more female teachers. A more detailed analysis of reasons for not attending school among targeted sub-populations is recommended to focus future education programmes.

**Education at a glance:**

- Only 17 percent aged 25 years and over have attended any type of formal education
- Low literacy rate of 26 percent: 12 percent for women, 39 percent for men
- 9.5 million illiterate adult people in Afghanistan: 5.5 million are women and 4.0 million are men
- 48 percent of children between age 7 and 12 (a total of 2.3 million) are not attending primary school
- In the youngest age groups beyond primary school age literacy rates rise sharply
- Literacy gender gap has started to narrow, especially in urban areas

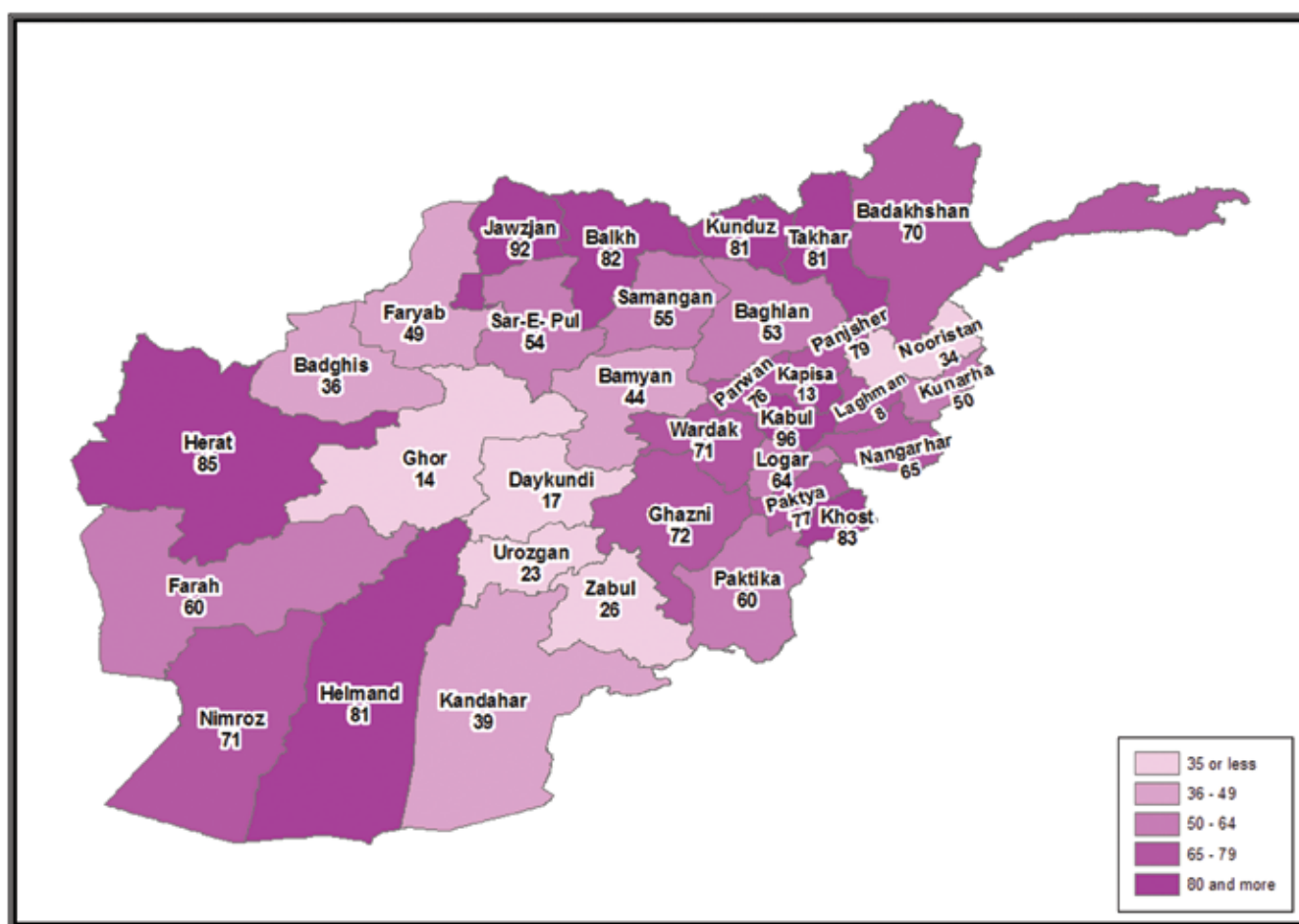
## Health

The recovery of Afghanistan's health system from a collapse in the recent decades of conflict is reflected in improving outcome indicators – but still the country is at the very bottom of international rankings. Besides poor general health conditions, such as those related to nutrition, access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, the main causes for this poor performance are grossly inadequate availability, access and quality of health care services.

### Access to health services

The large majority of the Afghan population (85 percent) can reach at least one type of health facility within one hour by any means of transport – but with gross difference between the provinces. Best access to health services have Kabul, Jawzjan and Kapisa. Access is the lowest in Ghor, Daykundi, Urozgan and Zabul (only 26 percent or less of the population can reach a facility within one hour, see Figure 10).

**Figure 10** Share of population with access to nearest health facility within one hour by any means of transport



The costs of transportation can be a barrier for visiting health facilities. A oneway motorized transport to any health facility costs on average 100 Afghanis, private transport is on average four times more expensive. Rural and Kuchi populations are severely disadvantaged compared to the urban population. The disadvantage is accumulative, since not only can fewer people reach a health facility within one hour walking, they also have to pay significantly more for motorized transport - if available at all.

### Impeded access for women

Access to health services is even more constrained for women, since they are usually required to be accompanied by a male, doubling any travel costs. Of all girls and women who are ill or injured, 47 percent cite distance and 49 percent cite expenses as a reason for not seeking medical care.



### Antenatal care

Skilled antenatal care (ANC) services present opportunities for reaching pregnant women with interventions that may be vital to their health and that of their infants – including medical check-ups, referrals of pregnancies that could result in complicated deliveries, information about managing pregnancies and deliveries, immunization, breastfeeding and child spacing. Nationwide, 36 percent of women reported the use of skilled ANC services – with 71 percent usage in urban areas, 30 percent in rural areas and only 17 percent among Kuchi women. Women with primary education had twice the likelihood (67 percent) of using skilled ANC during pregnancy compared to women with no formal education (33 percent).

### Skilled attendance at birth

Skilled birth attendance (SBA) is considered to be the single most critical intervention for ensuring safe motherhood, because it hastens the timely delivery of emergency obstetric and newborn care. The overall proportion of women delivering with a skilled birth attendant is very low in Afghanistan at 24 percent. 37 percent delivered in the presence of relative or a friend, 33 percent used traditional birth attendants. Kuchi women are least likely to use skilled birth attendants (8 percent). In addition, 15 percent of rural women as compared to 69 percent of urban women reported using skilled birth attendants for their last birth.

### Disability

The number of disabled people in Afghanistan amounted to 406 thousand, implying an overall disability prevalence of 1.6 percent. Some 188 thousand of these suffer from more than one disability. The prevalence for males was found to be higher than for females: 1.9 against 1.4 percent. Overall, 10 percent of Afghan households had one or more members with a disability. The most frequent types of disabilities are problems with walking, followed by problems with seeing and remembering. Respectively 179, 137 and 96 thousand people suffer these problems. As could be expected from gender differences in mobility, the number of male victims of traffic and work accidents, and of mines and war is significantly higher than the corresponding figures for females. Overall 60 thousand (13 percent) reported to be disabled because of mines, explosives, conflict and war, but 49 thousand (82 percent) of these are men.

**Table 6 Disability, by sex, and by cause of disability**

Cause of disability	Sex					
	Male		Female		Both sexes	
	Thousands	Percentage	Thousands	Percentage	Thousands	Percentage
Traffic accident	7	3	3	1	10	2
Work accident	16	6	8	4	24	5
Other accident	17	6	10	5	27	6
Mines, explosives	24	9	4	2	28	6
Conflicts, war	25	10	7	3	32	7
Illness	78	30	82	41	160	35
Old age	83	32	84	41	167	36
Drugs	2	1	0	0	2	0
Other	9	4	5	2	14	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>100</b>

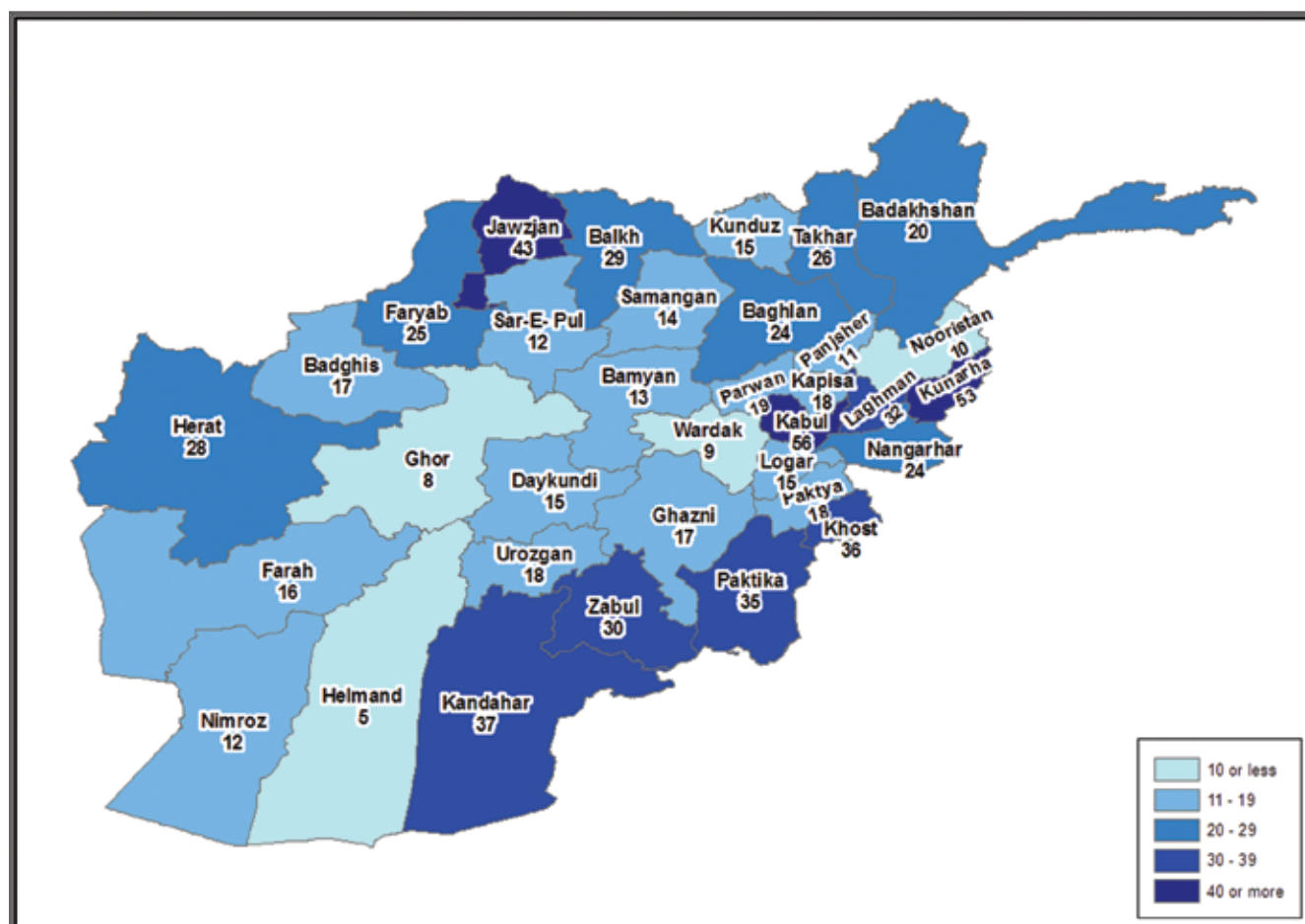
#### Health characteristics at a glance

- 37 percent of children aged 12-23 months received the recommended full immunization against tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and measles
- The corresponding rates for urban, rural and Kuchi populations are 63, 33 and 13 percent
- Only 36 percent of pregnant women use skilled antenatal care services
- Only 24 percent of delivering women use skilled birth attendants
- More than 400 thousand Afghans were reported as disabled
- 85 percent of the population is within one hour travel distance to any health facility, but for those on foot the proportion is only 68 percent

## Housing

The housing situation of a population is often a direct reflection of their living conditions and socio-economic development. In Afghanistan this situation can be defined as extremely poor. With regard to utilities only 27 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water, 20 percent is connected to the electric grid and no more than 5 percent has improved sanitation. The lack of basic infrastructure for water and sanitation implies high risks for contracting potentially fatal diseases, and is especially detrimental for the health and survival chances of infants and young children. The lack of electricity prohibits – among other restraints – an effective spread of information to the general public through mass media, like radio, TV and internet. Use of the latter is virtually absent among the population, whereas use of mobile phones has penetrated into only 6 percent of the population.

*Figure 12 Share of the total population with access to safe drinking water*



According to the MDG criteria, the share of the urban Afghan population that can be considered living in physically and environmentally depriving housing conditions is an alarming 93 percent. The households of these people are lacking access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living area, durability of housing or secure tenure, or any combination of these.

The pattern of housing types in Afghanistan is dominated by single-family houses. Of the sedentary population in urban and rural areas this housing type accommodates, respectively, 55 and 76 percent of households. Living in tents is exclusively a phenomenon of the semi-nomadic Kuchi. The construction materials of Afghan dwellings are relatively uniform, especially for rural and resident Kuchi households. A typical Afghan house is made of mud brick walls, a wooden roof and has a dirt floor. Urban houses somewhat deviate from this general picture in the sense that concrete is a more common building material, especially for floors, as well as bricks and stone. Thereby, they provide more durable shelter than the traditional Afghan house. The most frequently observed numbers of rooms per dwelling for rural Afghan households are two and three, whereas for urban households it is three and four.

**Table 7 Households, by type of dwelling, and by residence (in percentages)**

Residence	Type of dwelling						Total
	Single family house	Part of a shared house	Appartment	Tent	Temporary shelter / shack	Other	
Urban	55	40	2	0	3	0	100
Rural	76	19	0	0	4	1	100
Kuchi	24	4	0	65	7	0	100
National	69	22	0	4	4	1	100

Health conditions in the household are impaired by overcrowding in 34 percent of the dwellings, and by the use of solid fuels for cooking (83 percent) and heating (98 percent). The breakdown by residence invariably shows that rural and Kuchi populations are significantly disadvantaged compared to the urban population. The magnitude of this observation is further amplified by the notion that no less than 93 percent of the urban population – 4.4 million people – live in conditions of physical and environmental deprivation. It is observed that a large number (44 percent in urban areas, 23 percent overall) of households cannot prove the ownership of their dwelling by either inheritance, building the house, formal renting agreements or having a registered deed.

The provision of public utilities for water and sanitation is an essential development area, since these have an immense and direct impact on basic hygiene and public health. Priority to improvement of water supply also fully corresponds to the top ranking of development priorities by local communities. Even modest improvements in these areas could substantially reduce the high child mortality in Afghanistan by reducing major killer diseases. The present access of the population to safe drinking water and improved sanitation – 27 and 5 percent, respectively – are among the poorest in the world. Available figures suggest that large improvements in recent years are unlikely. This implies that accelerated efforts are required, which in the case of safe water supply can possibly rely on innovative and durable purification technologies.

A fourth criterion of the mentioned MDG indicator relates to overcrowding, which is defined as households with more than three people sharing a room. Implemented nationally this criterion applies to one-third of all Afghan households, exposing the occupants to heightened risks of infectious diseases. In-house safety is also jeopardized by the high incidence (83 percent) of burning solid fuels for cooking and heating. Programmes to stimulate efficient types of stoves and alternative sources of energy will contribute to health improvement and preservation of scarce resources.

The provision of electricity to the population is still in an early stage, as only 20 percent is connected to the electric grid at least some time during the day. However, this indicates a substantial increase compared to the 14 percent connection reported in the NRVA 2005. Electricity provides a source for light, but importantly also opportunities for mass communication through radio and television. Information, education and communication to the public on various themes – health, family planning, gender equity, etc. – will therefore be more effective if electricity supply is increased. Other communication means, like mobile phones and internet, are hardly available to the general population. Only 6 percent of the population has a mobile phone, and use of internet is negligible as of yet.

#### **Housing at a glance**

- The overall housing situation is extremely poor
- Only 27 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water
- No more than 5 percent has improved sanitation
- Even modest improvements in provision of public services for water and sanitation could substantially reduce the risks for contracting potentially fatal diseases
- 20 percent is connected to the electric grid
- Health conditions in the household are impaired by overcrowding in 34 percent of the dwellings
- 93 percent (4.4 million) of the urban Afghan population can be considered living in physically and environmentally depriving housing conditions
- Very poor communication and information infrastructure

## Position of women

The society of Afghanistan is characterized by very strong gender segregation and restrictive rules, especially for women. Within this social context, the living conditions of Afghan women are particularly poor. The NRVA 2007/8 confirms that a consistent pattern of relative deprivation exists across almost all development sectors.

The NRVA findings show large gender gaps in the education sector. In Afghanistan literacy of women is less than one-third of that of men. On the other hand comparison of literacy across age groups shows an accelerating increase of female literacy, which strongly suggests recent improvements of the educational system. This is supported by the increase of girls' enrolment in primary education since the previous NRVA assessment. Especially in urban areas the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) target of 70 percent enrolment of girls is within reach. While among children the gender gap is continuing to narrow, NRVA shows a total of 9.5 million adults still in need of basic reading and writing skills: 5.5 million of this total is female.

Afghan women are experiencing high fertility (around 6.3 children per woman), closely spaced births, early pregnancies and poor maternal health care in terms of antenatal and delivery care. In addition, the health system provides gender-specific barriers to women because of their restricted mobility and unresponsiveness by providing insufficient female health personnel. Despite the very low levels of maternal health care provision, the NRVA surveys suggest significant improvements in the last few years.

Also in terms of age at first marriage noticeable changes can be observed. Increasingly smaller proportions of women marry at young (before 18) and very young (before 15) ages, and the average age difference between wives and husbands has significantly declined. These changes are important with respect to pregnancy-related health risks and more gender balance in household decision making. An issue that is partly related to large spousal age gaps is the large number of widows in the country – over half a million. In the context of Afghanistan, these women, along with 70 thousand female heads of households, can be classified as especially vulnerable.

Women's position on the labour market is also particularly weak, among other things indicated by their continuous very low participation in economic activities. Many factors bear down upon women's quest for economic productivity, including restrictions to mobility, reproductive responsibilities, limited economic opportunities, and covert preference for males on the labour market. Only 47 percent of the working-age females are currently active on the labour market, compared to the very high 86 percent labour force participation rate of males. Women's participation is larger in the rural and Kuchi populations (respectively, 61 and 70 percent), due to female engagement in agricultural and pastoral activities. In urban areas, female labour force participation is a very low 21 percent. Overall, it can be stated that women participate less in economic activities, for fewer hours and predominantly in vulnerable employment.

Women are much less predisposed to migration, as men represent the large majority of migrants. This especially applies to international migration. Women tend to migrate relatively more from rural to rural areas, probably due to marriage rather than to employment. Overall, female migrants are more likely to be economically inactive. The data indicate persistent cultural restrictions to women's mobility and highlight the dearth of economic opportunities for women in the country.

The NRVA findings on decision making indicate that women's say in various matters depends on the specific area of decision making, but that it is generally limited or very limited. On specific family affairs, such as family planning, marriage, care of the elderly and education of the children, women tend to have relatively more influence through joint decision-making with others, but even here far more often their husbands decide alone. In financial matters – household spending or taking or paying off debt – decision-making is in the large majority of situations the exclusive domain of the husband or father of the women. Even for the relatively few women who generate income themselves, only 20 percent decide on spending freely on their own. In various decision domains, however, women's empowerment seems to increase with age.

**Table 8 Primary female household member's report on the usual decision maker in selected choice situations (in percentages)**

Decision on	Usual decision maker					
	Head / father	Wife of head	Head / father with wife	Head/father with concerned person	Head/father, wife & concerned person	Other combination
Household food purchase	80	2	7	0	0	10
Head's clothing purchase	84	4	5	0	0	7
Head's wife clothing purchase	61	15	18	0	0	6
Children's clothing purchase	63	11	17	0	0	8
Medicine for head's wife	80	4	8	1	0	7
Medicine spending for child	77	4	9	0	0	10
Son's marriage	42	4	24	6	13	11
Daughter's marriage	44	4	24	4	12	11
Education for boys	62	4	22	2	2	7
Education for girls	62	4	24	1	2	8
Care of elderly	47	24	10	1	1	17
Taking on or paying off debt	90	1	2	0	0	7

Representation of women's voices in the community is also poor compared to that of men. In the Community Development Councils, the rate of direct women's representation is only 60 percent of that of men, and in the traditional Shuras it is only 35 percent. It can, therefore, be concluded that in both these primary institutions of the household and the community, equity in decision making is far from established.

The general conclusion should be that huge challenges remain with respect to women's mobility, participation in public life, decision making, health, and access to economic and educational opportunities. The most urgent needs are found among the rural and Kuchi populations, and in line with that, gender gaps are usually larger among these than in the urban population, with the notable exception of labour force participation and employment. But on the positive side, the NRVA suggests that significant improvements can be achieved in a relatively short time span, as in the case of the education and health sectors.

#### Position of women at a glance

- Consistent pattern of relative deprivation exists across almost all development sectors, including education, health and labour market
- Early marriage and pregnancy; high rates of pregnancies and high fertility expose women to high risks of maternal morbidity and mortality
- Poor maternal health care
- Gender gaps are large in decision making, mobility, migration and marriage
- Increase of female education and literacy in recent years

## Household shocks and community preferences

Afghanistan is a country with a high-risk profile due to a combination of climatic and natural circumstances and being a historically grown hotbed of social and political conflict and economic vulnerability. In these circumstances households are facing numerous shocks - negative incidents that are outside their control. The consequences of household shocks can be temporary and relatively mild, but they can also shake the very existence of the household and its members. More than two-thirds (71 percent) of Afghan households experienced in the year before the survey at least one shock - like natural disasters, economic hardship, violence, water-related problems, illness and death.

For the first time the NRVA survey contained questions concerning influx of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The most remarkable observation from Table 9 on household shocks is that this experience has caused so much upheaval. Nationwide, no less than 60 percent of households experienced negative consequences of arrivals of refugees or returnees. Old feuds may be renewed, returnees may want to reclaim land and houses that in their absence have been occupied by others and, overall, additional pressure on scarce resources – also in view of high population growth – may cause conflicts. Figure 13 indicates that the refugee-related problems disproportionately affected the north-eastern half of the country. The next most frequent causes for household shocks were natural disasters, (39 percents), agriculture and livestock problems (22 percent) and drinking water problems (18 percent).

**Table 9 Incidence of households shocks in the 12 months before the survey, by type of shock, and by survey, residence (in percentages) <sup>1</sup>**

Survey, residence	Generic shocks								
	Any shock	Water	Agricultural	Natural disaster	Security	Financial	Epidemics	Refugees/ IDPs	Idiosyncratic shocks
<b>NRVA 2007/8</b>									
Urban	45	6	5	18	2	4	0	39	15
Rural	76	21	24	44	13	3	1	65	31
Kuchi	84	28	48	40	13	1	0	61	37
National	71	18	22	39	11	3	0	60	28
<b>NRVA 2005</b>									
Urban	18	23	10	36	9	27	9	n.d.	26
Rural	51	25	48	55	12	19	10	n.d.	10
Kuchi	52	30	68	40	9	9	8	n.d.	15
National	45	25	47	53	11	19	9	n.d.	11

<sup>1</sup> Basic classification of shocks: generic shocks relate to general occurrences, like floods, livestock diseases, drought or general insecurity. Idiosyncratic shocks refer to events affecting specific households or persons, such as the death of a household member, loss of employment or a burnt-down home.



