



# UNFPA Afghanistan

## Country Programme Overview

October 2020

Delivering a world where  
every pregnancy is wanted,  
every childbirth is safe and  
every young person's potential is fulfilled



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Join UNFPA to help the  
most vulnerable people in  
Afghanistan thrive

## PREFACE



Afghanistan is a country with incredible passion and promise. Permeating the colourful fabric of its culture and society is an unwavering pride. A wary yet persistent optimism. And a commitment to bring about change so all Afghans have a chance to enjoy a peaceful and prosperous future—a reimagined past that once was, long before destructive conflicts bled one into the next, unjustly eroding this reality.

There is good reason for hope: Public health has improved in the last decade, evident in the fact that relatively less women die in childbirth—and their newborns and young children have a better chance at survival now too. More women are learning about and using modern contraceptives, empowering them with choices regarding when to have children and how many. While we still have a long way to go in these areas, the advances of the past decade are powerful forces of progress that combine to reduce poverty, and with it, a slew of other development outcomes.

Another reason for optimism is a demographic matter. Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations in the world, presenting a rare opportunity to catalyse and leverage what is known as a ‘demographic dividend.’ In other words, investing in young Afghans today, of all backgrounds and genders—giving them a solid foundation of good health, education, leadership skills, and decent work within a good governance system—will pay off for the entire country. Under the right conditions, these young people will have the tools to propel the country’s social and economic transformation, reducing the burden on families struggling to make ends meet and strained public resources.

But it is still too early to breathe a sigh of relief. Shadowing these visions of a better tomorrow are stark hurdles we must first overcome.

Pervasive gender inequalities—including one of the highest prevalence rates of violence against women in the Asia-Pacific region—contributes to Afghanistan’s status as being among the worst places in the world to be a woman.

Sexual and reproductive health services are still hard to access, especially for those living in rural areas. Despite progress, far too many women and their babies still die in childbirth because they are not screened for risks during pregnancy and they deliver without skilled birth attendants.

Young people also have sexual and reproductive health needs, but they often have nowhere to turn for guidance. Consequently, their potential is undermined by, for example, unwanted pregnancies. When such impediments hold young people back, and when they are not given opportunities to learn skills to lead the country's future, Afghanistan cannot harness its prospective demographic dividend.

Between devastating wars and natural disasters, Afghanistan has endured countless humanitarian crises, both contributing to and exacerbating the challenges that stand in the way of a country where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Now in the face of COVID-19, what was already difficult becomes more complex—and all the more necessary, too.

We will not give up hope. Through population data-driven solutions, UNFPA continues to step up and adapt, working alongside our tenacious partners, including the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, donors, and civil society, to help secure this future of rights and choices for all.

We have momentum and will carry it forward. We call upon leaders across the spectrum, from young Afghans and women who want a say in shaping their country, to policymakers and influencers with the power to heed these underrepresented voices, to others working in the development field with complementary goals, to the private sector and donors with the resources to support and join us.

Together, let's help this magnificent country persevere and lean into its relentless optimism by transforming obstacles into results.

Encouraged by what we can accomplish together,

Mr. Koffi Kouame  
*Country Representative, UNFPA Afghanistan*

## WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

This document describes UNFPA Afghanistan’s multi-faceted solutions to move the needle towards rights and choices for all Afghans—especially the furthest behind—so they have the best chance at reaching their potential.

We call upon the following institutions and individuals to learn about our work and join in these efforts:

- **Public officials** with the influence to shape policies and programmes in Afghanistan;
- **Donors and private sector partners** with the resources to scale the impact of UNFPA’s programmes to reach more communities in Afghanistan;
- **National partners and United Nations agencies** with capacity and mutual interest to leverage resources in support of shared objectives;
- **South-South collaborators** who wish to replicate UNFPA programmes in other parts of the world and offer shared learning; and
- **Individuals interested in learning about innovative solutions** to help end maternal deaths, unmet needs for family planning, and gender-based violence and harmful practices, especially in conflict-prone settings with similar development goals.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1976, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) began working in Afghanistan, investing in programmes intended to secure sexual and reproductive health, rights, gender equality, adolescent and youth empowerment, and quality population data for the benefit of all Afghans.

UNFPA channels its efforts throughout the country, but places particular emphasis on reaching women, adolescents, and youth who are the furthest behind. These people often live in rural areas with high rates of poverty, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, and harmful practices, while residing in communities impacted by security and other humanitarian crises. Home to one of the world's youngest, fastest growing populations, Afghanistan faces significant challenges. Most of these are created or exacerbated by conflict. Weak governance and cultural barriers add layers of complexity.

To address many of these issues and achieve the three Transformative Results UNFPA is striving for zero unmet need for family planning information and services, preventable maternal deaths, sexual and gender-based violence, and harmful practices against women and girls. Importantly, this work does not sit in a silo: UNFPA Afghanistan's Country Programme Document, and thus programmes, reflect the priorities of myriad national and international commitments, which are expanded upon in this document.

### Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Without gender equality, none of the Transformative Results or Sustainable Development Goals are possible. UNFPA supports the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan<sup>1</sup> in developing national policies, plans, and strategies for gender equality, working in particular with the Ministries of Public Health, Women's Affairs, and Information and Culture.

UNFPA also coordinates the country's efforts to respond to gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. UNFPA designs and oversees unique programmes to prevent and respond to gender-based violence through locally contextualised and creative approaches. For example Family Protection Centres, Women Friendly Safe Spaces, and an effort to reform the police and legal sector's response to gender-based violence.

### Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

To address the serious unmet need for family planning, maternal health care, and other sexual and reproductive health and rights, UNFPA provides institutional support to the Government of Afghanistan in multiple capacities, including assisting development of numerous strategies and guidelines, and participating in various working groups and taskforces. UNFPA was also instrumental in forming the Afghanistan Midwives Association and the Afghan Midwifery and Nursing Council, among other initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter called "the Government of Afghanistan" for brevity.

Additionally, through the Family Health Houses, UNFPA provides life-saving services to improve the health of pregnant women, and those who plan to become pregnant (or recently gave birth), and their young children. UNFPA coordinates an initiative that trains Afghan gynaecologists on complicated, high-risk obstetric fistula repair surgeries.

## Adolescent and Youth Empowerment

Realising the potential of adolescents and youth is weaved throughout UNFPA's programming in Afghanistan, especially given that the country's future rests on the shoulders of this large and ever-growing segment of the population. UNFPA is the lead UN agency tasked with increasing access to sexual and reproductive health information and services while equipping young people with leadership skills and opportunities to take part in public policy decision-making.

UNFPA partners with the Government of Afghanistan to develop numerous policies and strategies securing the rights of adolescent and youth, especially with the Ministry of Public Health's Adolescent Directorate. UNFPA also supports multiple adolescent and youth-related committees and working groups, including two that are chaired by His Excellency the Second Vice President of Afghanistan and His Excellency the CEO of Afghanistan. UNFPA is helping create a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum for schools with the Ministries of Public Health and Education.

Innovative programmes designed and led by UNFPA include Youth Parliament; Youth Health Line; Youth Health Corner, which provides pre-marriage counselling; a school health worker volunteer programme; and Youth Peer Network.

## Humanitarian Affairs

Humanitarian crises can push people who are already vulnerable to inequalities even further behind. UNFPA assists Afghan refugees who have returned to Afghanistan, internally displaced persons, gender-based violence survivors, and host communities of newcomers as a result of humanitarian events—especially women and their young children, adolescents and youth—by distributing Emergency Reproductive Health Kits and Dignity Kits. UNFPA also deploys Mobile Health Teams to respond to communities affected by emergencies, providing quick-relief in the form of health and psychosocial support for the most vulnerable people.

## Population and Development

Reliable and timely data are fundamental to measuring progress towards international commitments, national strategies and action plans, as well as planning evidence-based policies and programmes. The Population and Development Unit of UNFPA supports the Government of Afghanistan to enhance its capacity in the areas of population and development, including data management and advocacy for data utilisation to inform policies and programmes.

# ADVANCING PROGRESS TOWARDS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS

Since 1976, UNFPA has provided expert technical, advisory, and programmatic guidance to the Government of Afghanistan. This support aims to help the country achieve its development goals and UNFPA's transformational results through the lens of universal health coverage, 'leaving no one behind', and 'reaching the furthest behind first.' The partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and UNFPA is outlined in the *Country Programme Document*, which expounds the fourth cycle of UNFPA's work in Afghanistan. The current programme cycle was initially scheduled for 2015-2019 and has been extended to 2021.

The *Country Programme Document* carries forward the strategic priorities of the following plans, conventions, and agendas, all while honouring Islamic values:

## Global

- **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** A blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and planet adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030; this is an overarching framework under which all others outlined below fall.
- **UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021):** Strategies to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to reduce maternal mortality, and to improve the lives of women, adolescents and youth, enabled by population dynamics, human rights and gender equality.
- **International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action:** A UNFPA-initiated political declaration that celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, upon which 179 governments reaffirmed their commitments and pledged to accelerate efforts to achieve the transformational results of zero unmet need for family planning information and services, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

## National

- **Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (2017-2021):** Sets the country's economic, political, security, and development approach to reducing poverty, improving the welfare of the Afghan people, and achieving national self-reliance.
- **United Nations Development Cooperation Framework (2015-2021):**<sup>2</sup> Lays out the UN's contributions of technical assistance, services, and supplies to assist Afghanistan's pursuit of economic development, essential services, social equity, law and order, accountable governance in the context of human rights and gender equality.
- **ONE UN in Afghanistan document (2017-2021):** Outlines UN efforts to work together more effectively and efficiently through strengthened alignment to the *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework*.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between UNFPA Afghanistan's *Country Programme Document (2015 – 2021)* and the above plans, frameworks and agendas.



Figure 1: Relationship between UNFPA Afghanistan's Country Programme Document and global and national frameworks and agendas

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Development Cooperation Framework (2015-2021) replaces the UN Development Assistance Framework to Support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2010-2013). When UNFPA's Country Programme Document (2015-2019) was signed, the 2010-2013 Framework was still in place, and thus informed UNFPA's work in Afghanistan.

## Organisation of the Country Programme

The current UNFPA Afghanistan *Country Programme Document (2015 – 2021)*, and therefore the Country Office’s work, is divided into four key thematic priorities (Reproductive Health, Population and Demographics, Gender, and Humanitarian) reflecting the objectives of the national and international plans, frameworks, and agendas above. The Country Office has five programme units, which are structured around each of the four *Country Programme Document* thematic priorities, with an additional crosscutting programme unit dedicated to humanitarian affairs. Some of the programme units have innovative ‘flagship programmes,’ which help operationalise the *Country Programme Document*.<sup>3</sup> The flagship programmes are: 1) **Family Health Houses**, under the Reproductive Health Unit; 2) **Youth Parliament**; 3) **Youth Health Line**; 4) **Youth Health Corners**, under the Adolescent and Youth Unit; and 5) **Family Protection Centres**, under the Gender Unit.

The relationships between the *Country Programme Document* thematic priorities, the programme units, the flagship programmes, and UNFPA’s Transformative Results are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: UNFPA Afghanistan Country Programme organisation

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA Afghanistan’s flagship programmes are innovative and successful initiatives currently being implemented that serve as prime models for scaling up and replication to support those furthest behind, especially vulnerable individuals with limited access to services and opportunities, and individuals in remote locations.

# WOMEN'S HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND SAFETY

## Women's Health, Well-Being, and Safety: the Situation

Unequal gender norms prevent women and girls from knowing, deciding, and having the power to act on their choices and rights for their own sexual and reproductive health. Gender inequality also enables exertion of control over women and girls through gender-based violence and a range of harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages. Taken together, unfulfilled sexual and reproductive health, rights, gender-based violence, and harmful practices hamper girls' and women's health and well-being, the productivity and prosperity of society, and a country's reputation as being one that upholds the rights of all its people.

Women's rights in Afghanistan have drastically deteriorated over the course of more than four decades of war. The country's history of intense geopolitical conflict has led to a deeply male-dominated, patriarchal culture, which tends to position women at the bottom of the social hierarchy. **In fact, Afghanistan is repeatedly classified as one of the worst places to be a woman according to expert-led studies; an aftermath of the country's traumatic past.<sup>4</sup> It is one of three countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the highest rates of physical and/or sexual violence committed by husbands.<sup>5</sup>** Sadly, 46% of women experienced one or both of these types of violence in the years prior to Afghanistan's 2015 national violence against women prevalence survey. Only 20% of these women sought help.<sup>6</sup>

Gender inequality is also reflected in the fact that girls and young women tend to marry earlier than males in Afghanistan, as well as the relatively high rates of forced, early and child marriages.<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons these human rights violations are so pervasive in Afghanistan is the general acceptance and/or tolerance of gender inequality by both men and women. Even many gender-based violence response service providers, including health workers and law enforcement, believe women should adjust their behaviours in order to stop the violence.<sup>8</sup>

4 "TRUSTLAW POLL-Afghanistan Is Most Dangerous Country for Women," 2011

5 Among countries in Asia and the Pacific surveyed between 2000-2020 using the methodology of the World Health Organization Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence or the Domestic Violence module of the Demographic and Health Survey. The footnoted statement refers to violence that occurred in the 12 months prior to these surveys. Jansen, 2020.

6 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2015

7 Ibid.

8 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2015; Roseveare et al., 2019



## UNFPA Afghanistan's Investments to Improve Women's Health, Well-Being, and Safety

In view of this backdrop, and at the request of the Government of Afghanistan, UNFPA's Gender Unit is working with the Ministry of Public Health's Gender Directorate to support women through a variety of targeted initiatives.

The work of UNFPA Afghanistan's Gender Unit is summarised here.

### UNFPA Solutions for Gender Equality in Afghanistan

#### Policy advocacy and coordination

- **Afghanistan Gender Based Violence Sub-Cluster**
  - UNFPA is the coordinator of the Afghanistan Gender Based Violence Sub-Cluster. This committee was established as a national coordinating body to strengthen and enhance the many efforts and stakeholders preventing and responding to gender-based violence. It particular, it focuses on the most vulnerable segments of the population in a humanitarian setting impacted by natural disasters and conflict.

- **National Action Plan to Eliminate Early and Child Marriage**
  - In 2017, UNFPA provided technical expertise to develop the National Action Plan to Eliminate Early and Child Marriage, working with the Ministries of Information and Culture and Women’s Affairs. The strategy’s development was funded by the Embassy of Canada.
  - The Action Plan takes two approaches: developing and supporting initiatives to prevent and end child marriage as well as improving the implementation of laws and provision of services to people affected by child marriage.
- **Standard Operating Procedures for Healthcare Sector Response to Gender-Based Violence**
  - In 2012, UNFPA provided technical support to the Ministry of Public Health to develop *Standard Operating Procedures for Healthcare Sector Response to Gender-based Violence*. This guidance delineates specific roles and responsibilities for gender-based violence preventions and responses including identification, documentation, evidence collection, and referral of gender-based violence cases within the health sector. It generates a coherent set of relationships among agencies and organisations to enable survivors to receive the maximum level of assistance and protection in the most efficient way.

## Services

- **Family Protection Centres, a UNFPA Flagship Programme**
  - The Government of Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health and UNFPA have developed a ground-breaking model for providing life-saving services to women and girls in Afghanistan who are experiencing violence: Family Protection Centres.
  - Family Protection Centres are discreetly located in provincial and district-level government hospitals. These female-staffed, one-stop clinics provide a range of free, confidential services for survivors of gender-based violence. Women and girls can receive health care, psychosocial counselling, basic legal guidance, and optional referrals to third-party support mechanisms such as law enforcement and safe housing. As of mid-2020, there are 27 Family Protection Centres located in 22 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, with plans for six new Centres in six additional provinces.

- Family Protection Centres are often the only way for women and girls in Afghanistan to receive quality health care. The centres are tailored to address gender-based violence, which is otherwise absent from the national public health system. Being located inside public hospitals increases the likelihood that women and girls will be allowed to visit Family Protection Centres.
  - Increasing awareness and acceptance of the Family Protection Centres has driven a steady rise in the number of clients, with over 60,000 survivors of gender-based violence served between 2014 and 2019. The model has been so successful that UNFPA Afghanistan helped replicate it in South Sudan, given the similarities in complex socio-political contexts.
  - Family Protection Centres are funded by Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and UNFPA. The Centres are operated by four non-profit implementing partners with local knowledge and experience.
- **Police and Legal Sector Response to Gender-Based Violence**
    - Survivors of gender-based violence have not always been able to rely on help from Afghanistan’s police and legal sectors. Coordination structures between police, legal, and health services are weak, and information on gender-based violence prevention and response services are inadequate throughout the country. In a society where informal justice mechanisms like councils of village elders preside over formal structures, there is ongoing need to build capacity, public support for, and trust in the police and legal sectors’ response to gender-based violence.
    - Since 2013, with financial support from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and under the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General’s Office, UNFPA is working to improve the police and legal sector response to gender-based violence.

In 26 provinces, UNFPA:<sup>9</sup>

    - Coordinates a multi-stakeholder advocacy effort to drive national policies that strengthen the justice sector’s response to gender-based violence.
    - Developed a training manual—Police Taking Action on Violence against Women—which is now part of the National Police Academy curriculum.

<sup>9</sup> Data as of mid-2020.



- Trained almost 8,000 police officers, judges, prosecutors and lawyers at the regional and provincial level using the above manual to build awareness and skills on prevention of gender-based violence, their roles and responsibilities to help survivors, and the standard operating procedures for case management.
- Trained 200 security guards in trauma sensitivity and gender-based violence response guiding principles. These security guards are often the first interaction survivors have when they go to Family Response Units for help.
- Trained over 500 Family Response Unit staff on gender-based violence prevention and response, and standard operating procedures for case management. Located in police stations, Family Response Units are a key support mechanism for survivors of gender-based violence. UNFPA also designed and coordinates a mentorship programme for Family Response Unit staff to provide on-the-job coaching.

- Engaging over 5,500 community members to build awareness and enhance trust in—and respect for—the police and legal sectors’ roles in helping survivors of gender-based violence. As part of this, multi-sectoral referral networks of help for survivors will be enhanced within communities.
  - Strengthening institutional capacity to collect gender-based violence administrative data to inform programme and policy planning and monitoring.
  - The justice sector is a crucial component of Afghanistan’s gender-based violence response system. This initiative dovetails UNFPA Afghanistan’s Family Protection Centre flagship programme, which depends on a mature justice system for inbound referrals from police and outbound referrals to legal support for survivors of gender-based violence.
- **Women Friendly Safe Spaces**
    - As part of UNFPA’s humanitarian response, Women Friendly Safe Spaces provide a judgement-free environment for internally displaced women, survivors of violence, and others in need of a safe place to spend the day. Here, women can discuss the traumas and problems they face with peers who are in similar situations, helping to build networks among women; they learn about gender-based violence prevention and response; and they can participate in life-skills activities. Basic psychosocial counselling and Dignity Kits with hygiene and other essential products are available at the Safe Spaces too. Importantly, Safe Spaces enable identification of severe cases of violence and other problems that require referrals to external psychosocial, health, and legal services.
    - As of mid-2020, there are eight Women Friendly Safe Spaces in seven provinces: Nangarhar, Nimruz, Kandahar, Laghman, Kunar, Baghlan, and Kunduz.
    - Launched in 2018, Women Friendly Safe Spaces are supported by Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

## Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: The Situation

Access to information and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights are crucial to the well-being and productivity of women and young people—and more broadly, to healthy families and communities. Whether individuals receive and can act on such information and services has a significant bearing on a country's development and prosperity. In fact, the degree to which sexual and reproductive health and rights are realised can greatly hinder or accelerate progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Family planning education and tools are among the most effective global health and poverty reduction measures. When reproductive-age women have the knowledge and power to make choices regarding use of contraception, the results include drastic reductions in unplanned pregnancies and abortions, as well as maternal and newborn deaths. In addition, women empowered with family planning tools have more opportunities for education and earning potential. Investments in family planning pay off—for every US dollar spent, 6 dollars are saved.<sup>10</sup>

The Government of Afghanistan and its partners, including UNFPA, are working hard to improve access to information and services to enhance sexual and reproductive health, especially for women and young people. But many challenges lie ahead:

- **A serious unmet need for family planning persists in Afghanistan despite progress since 2003.** As of 2018, a quarter of pregnant and married women had an unmet need for family planning. This means women are having more children than they want and/or they would prefer to space their pregnancies further apart.<sup>11</sup> Adolescent mothers, 15-19 years old, accounted for almost 7% of births in Afghanistan between the years of 2015-2020. That is almost twice the average adolescent birth rate among other South Asian countries.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "What We Do: Family Planning Strategy Overview," 2020

<sup>11</sup> Afghanistan Health Survey 2018, 2019, p. 57

<sup>12</sup> Conceição, 2019



- A dangerous lack of health care for pregnant women in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas and for women with lower educations and incomes.** Between 2007-2017, less than 60% of women had at least one preventative care visit during pregnancy, called ‘antenatal’ care. All other countries in South Asia excluding India had significantly better access to antenatal care during the same period.<sup>13</sup> Even worse, only 20% of pregnant women had four antenatal care visits in Afghanistan as of 2018, which is an important clinical milestone for the survival of both mother and newborn.<sup>14</sup> From 2013-2018, less than 60% of births in Afghanistan were attended by skilled health personnel, which is a significantly smaller proportion than most other countries in South Asia.<sup>15</sup>
- Too many women die during pregnancy and childbirth in Afghanistan.** While the maternal mortality ratio has dropped by more than half since 2002, sadly, given the gaps in health care for pregnant women, an estimated 638 women still die in childbirth for every 100,000 who live.<sup>16</sup> That is a very high number of preventable pregnancy-related deaths both for regional and international standards.<sup>17</sup> In addition, 60% of women did not receive postnatal care after delivering a baby in Afghanistan, as of 2018. That is dangerous because the majority of global maternal deaths occur in the post-partum period, up to six weeks after birth.<sup>18</sup> Most of these deaths could be avoided through abundant community midwifery services. However, in Afghanistan there are only around 5,000 qualified midwives—less than a third of the estimated need to adequately serve the population.<sup>19</sup> Low coverage of health services due to distance is one of the leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality in Afghanistan, disproportionately affecting rural women.<sup>20</sup>

A drastic increase in related services and programming is needed in Afghanistan—especially targeted at youth and reproductive-age women in remote areas—to ensure no one is left behind.

13 Antenatal care data for India are not included in the Human Development Index global comparison. South Asian countries with available data are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Conceição, 2019).

14 Afghanistan Health Survey 2018, 2019

15 Conceição, 2019

16 Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2017, 2019, p. 34

17 Conceição, 2019

18 Afghanistan Health Survey 2018, 2019, pp. 54, 76

19 Concept Note on Family Health Houses, 2018; projected need for midwives in Afghanistan is calculated based on a standard World Health Organization formula in Workforce 2030, 2016, p. 40.

20 Afghanistan Health Survey 2006 in Concept Note on Family Health Houses, 2018

## UNFPA Afghanistan's Investments to Improve Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

All of UNFPA Afghanistan's programme units work to expand access to sexual and reproductive health and rights throughout the country. Whether through a gender, humanitarian, youth, or a population data lens, sexual and reproductive health and rights are core to UNFPA's mandate.

The work of UNFPA Afghanistan's Reproductive Health Unit is summarised below.

## UNFPA Solutions for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Afghanistan

### Policy advocacy, community mobilisation, and institutional capacity building

- **National Family Planning Behavioural Study on the Use and Non-use of Contraceptives in Afghanistan (2017)**
  - UNFPA conducted this study to understand contraceptive usage patterns in Afghanistan. It served as a comprehensive needs assessment for contraceptives and family planning services, generating knowledge for evidence-based decision making.
- **Birth Spacing/Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan 2018-2022**
  - UNFPA provided financial, technical, and coordination support to help the Ministry of Public Health develop the national Birth Spacing/Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan 2018-2022. This actionable roadmap is designed to help the Government of Afghanistan achieve its family planning goals by strengthening the foundation of family planning programming and service delivery at the national and sub-national levels.
- **National Family Planning Socio Behaviour Change Communication Strategic Plan (2019-2023)**
  - UNFPA provided financial, technical, and coordination support to the Ministry of Public Health to develop this strategy, which aims to help the Government achieve its family planning goals using evidence-based social and behaviour change communication activities.
- **National Family Planning Summit 2019**
  - In 2019, UNFPA organised the National Family Planning Summit, which mobilized the political commitment and leadership of government officials and renewed donor and partner commitments to invest in family planning.

- **Capacity development to improve availability and quality of human rights-based family planning services**
  - UNFPA has provided technical and coordination support to the Ministry of Public Health to develop training materials for almost 1,500 female health workers, over 1,200 male health workers, and nearly 3,000 community health workers on family planning counselling and contraceptive technology since 2015.
  
- **Community mobilisation campaign promoting family planning**
  - To increase the demand and enable supportive environments for family planning, since 2015 UNFPA has trained and mobilised more than 3,100 community gatekeepers and civil society activists, including journalists, heads of community health committees (shuras), youth activists, and leaders of women’s organisations. The trainings help participants promote family planning in their communities and dispel family planning myths and misconceptions. UNFPA also developed audio and video messages, which aired on national radio and TV, encouraging family planning.
  
- **Afghanistan Midwives Association & Afghan Midwifery and Nursing Council**
  - To formalize the field of midwifery in Afghanistan, UNFPA helped the Ministry of Public Health establish the Afghanistan Midwives Association (2005) and the Afghan Midwifery and Nursing Council (2018). These professional networks build midwives’ capacities through education. They also enable association with other midwives for resource sharing, and the networks institute regulations for the midwifery field, such as provision of official midwifery certifications.
  
- **State of Afghanistan’s Midwifery 2021 report**
  - UNFPA is supporting the Ministry of Public Health in capturing and analysing data to update this semi-regular publication on midwifery in Afghanistan. Data from the State of Afghanistan’s Midwifery 2021 report will be used to inform the State of the World’s Midwifery 2021 report.
  
- **Obstetric fistula repair capacity building**
  - Obstetric fistula repair is a complex operation. To ensure gynaecologists in Afghanistan have up-to-date skills and tools to address this and other pregnancy-related injuries, UNFPA has coordinated a South-South cooperation effort under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health. This partnership brings expert surgeons from countries with high rates of obstetric fistula to offer mentorship and trainings in three urban hospitals of Afghanistan: Kabul, Herat, and Jalalabad. Afghan gynaecologists are also sent abroad to shadow doctors with expertise in these areas.

## Services

- **Family Health Houses, a UNFPA flagship programme**
  - Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health and UNFPA, through its core resources, developed an innovative model called Family Health Houses. This programme delivers life-saving, essential reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health care to some of the most underserved parts of Afghanistan.
  - The programme trains individuals from rural communities to become community midwives through an intensive 26-month training and internship. After, they return to their villages to work in a Family Health House.
  - Through Family Health Houses, women—and their young children—have access to free, round-the-clock services before, during, and after pregnancy. Other services such as family planning are also available, and women with high-risk pregnancies receive proactive referrals to better equipped provincial and regional public health facilities.
  - Since 2010, 156 Family Health Houses have been established in six provinces, with plans for an additional 150 in seven more provinces opening by 2022. Family Health Houses are funded by the Government of Canada, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Afghanistan, the United Nations Development Programme Global Fund Partnership, and UNFPA.
  - The impact of Family Health Houses is felt across communities in Afghanistan. More than 30,000 women received delivery care by skilled birth attendants between 2015-2019, resulting in a near complete reduction in maternal mortality in the communities with access to Family Health Houses. Thousands of families now see childbirth as a time of new beginnings, not a time of fear—sparing children the heartbreak of losing their mothers, and mothers of losing their children.
- **Midwifery Helpline**
  - In 2016, UNFPA initiated a toll-free helpline for health service providers, particularly midwives. Available 24/7, the Midwifery Helpline provides immediate, expert advice to callers throughout the country, including remote and underserved areas. This is especially critical for providers who are facing difficulties in managing complicated maternal or newborn cases far from public health facilities.

# ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

## Adolescent and Youth Empowerment: the Situation

In Afghanistan, there are 10.5 million young people ages 10-24. That is one third of the entire population. Even more striking: 75% of the population is under 30 years old—one of the youngest demographics in the world.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, over half of the people in Afghanistan live below the poverty line.<sup>22</sup> That—combined with the temptations and dangers of substance use and abuse, as well as the ramifications from unmet sexual and reproductive health needs, regular exposure to violence, and a lack of education and jobs—make young Afghans extremely vulnerable. But with the right investments and opportunities, young people can become a critical driving force behind Afghanistan's socioeconomic transformation.

## A Promising Demographic Dividend

Afghanistan is uniquely positioned to leverage a 'demographic bonus,' which under the right conditions has unequivocally accelerated economic growth and social development in several countries around the world. A demographic bonus occurs when a series of shifts in the population age structure, combined with core investments in young people, results in a large working class equipped with the health, education, skills, and opportunities to rapidly advance the country's development and face new challenges that arise. In Afghanistan, the conditions are ripe for a demographic bonus.<sup>23</sup>

However, to fully reap the benefits, and for Afghanistan's young people and thus the country's future to truly flourish, a rapid acceleration is required to speed up progress across the development goals. As such, UNFPA Afghanistan and its partners are working with the Government to make vital improvements in the following areas.

## Lack of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Adolescents and Youth

Adolescents and youth are the most important segment of society to receive sexual and reproductive health and rights programming. Young people often lack knowledge about health matters and access to health care. In turn, unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy terminations, birth complications—including disability, illness, and death—and contraction of sexually transmitted infections are more likely.

21 Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, 2019

22 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016 - 17 Analysis Report, 2018

23 Demographic bonuses result from a confluence of population trends. These include public health improvements in preceding decades contributing to a rise in births—in other words, increased national fertility—and decreased infant and child deaths. Thus a large number of young people are born and increasingly survive in a relatively short period, creating a 'youth bulge.' As young people reach working age, a sizeable workforce emerges, and as fertility rates decline, working people have less economic and social dependents. In turn, their resources go further, helping to alleviate poverty and spur development (Investing in Youth, 2015). A 'demographic dividend' is the economic growth potential that can result from these population shifts, when the share of the working-age people (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older). (Demographic Dividend, 2016)



Social stigmas and beliefs against sexual activity outside of marriage, and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages, put young people at an increased risk of not realising their rights to sexual and reproductive health care. Looking at child marriage alone, despite the trend of first marriages occurring somewhat later in life overall, it remains a relatively common practice in Afghanistan. Almost half of women between the ages of 25-49 had been married by age 18, and nearly one in seven women had been married by age 15, as of 2015.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, a third of women already started childbearing by 19, as of 2010.<sup>25</sup>

### **Lack of Representation in the Political Sphere for Adolescents and Youth**

Young people—who make up the majority of Afghanistan’s population—are under-represented in the political sphere. This means that a minority demographic—older adults—are making key policy decisions for the majority demographic to which they do not belong.

### **UNFPA Afghanistan’s Investments in Adolescents and Youth**

UNFPA is the lead United Nations agency addressing adolescent and youth issues. With the Government of Afghanistan and other partners, UNFPA is taking unprecedented steps to give young Afghans the best chance of achieving their full potential.

<sup>24</sup> 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2015, p. 69

<sup>25</sup> AMS 2010, 2011, p. 50

The work of UNFPA Afghanistan's Adolescent and Youth Unit is summarised here.

## **UNFPA Solutions for Adolescent and Youth Empowerment in Afghanistan**

### **Policy Advocacy**

- **Afghanistan National Youth Strategy 2018-2022**
  - UNFPA provided financial, technical, and coordination support for the development and implementation of this broad-based policy and strategy that strives to empower youth in Afghanistan. Working with the Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs, UNFPA engaged a wide range of stakeholders to garner support from the crosscutting policy and strategy, including formation of a steering committee under the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs.
- **Youth Policy and Strategy Oversight Committee Youth and Employment Committee**
  - UNFPA provides support to these important adolescent and youth affairs committees. The Youth Policy and Strategy Oversight Committee is chaired by His Excellency the Second Vice President of Afghanistan and the Youth and Employment Committee is chaired by His Excellency the CEO of Afghanistan.
- **Inter-agency Network for Youth Development**
  - UNFPA is an integral member of this group that coordinates and leverages UN engagements in Afghanistan related to youth issues.
- **Adolescent Health Working Group**
  - Under the Ministry of Public Health's Adolescent Directorate, UNFPA co-chairs an advocacy platform called the Adolescent Health Working Group, which monitors issues related to young people's rights to sexual and reproductive health. As part of this engagement, UNFPA helped develop the adolescent health component of the National Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health Strategy 2017–2021, which is supplemental to the framework of the National Health Strategy 2016-2020, also developed by the Ministry of Public Health. The adolescent health component advances the sexual and reproductive health rights of the many young people in Afghanistan.

- **Family Life Education**

- UNFPA provided technical and coordination support to the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Education to develop the framework for a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum and corresponding educational materials for public schools in Afghanistan. One component of the curriculum called Family Life Education also addresses topics like gender-based violence and human trafficking.
- Rolling out the curriculum will require additional funding and political support, which UNFPA is working to secure. Once in place, it will be an immensely valuable, proactive measure that helps achieve UNFPA's Transformative Results of zero unmet need for family planning and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices.

## Services

- **Youth Parliament, a UNFPA flagship programme**

- Youth Parliament gives young men and women ages 18-30 the power to advocate their needs and influence real public policies.
- 118 Youth Parliamentarians are selected in a fair, democratic, and transparent process. They represent all 34 provinces and various demographics, such as nomads, different ethnicities, and people with disabilities. Youth Parliament convenes in Kabul to discuss policy issues aligned to the six strategic directions of the National Youth Strategy and make recommendations to the National Parliament of Afghanistan. These six thematic focuses are health; education; employment; participation; sport; and crosscutting issues, including gender equity, peace and security, and environmental sustainability.
- Youth Parliament provides an unparalleled platform to improve policy outcomes that reflect the needs of young people and build trust in the electoral system by encouraging active Afghan citizenship. It also raises awareness of Afghan issues and motivates young people to get involved in peaceful politics and leadership opportunities, and Youth Parliamentarians inspire the younger generation to use their voice for change.
- Youth Parliament is showing promising results; around 15% of their recommendations have influenced national public policies so far. Three Youth Parliamentarians have become mayors in Afghanistan, including one young woman, and one was elected to the National Parliament. And 90% of Youth Parliamentarians have been exposed to and secured good jobs.

- **Youth Health Line, a UNFPA flagship programme**

- For the first time, Afghanistan's adolescents and youth know who to call with the tough questions and problems. In fact, this is the only way young people can get free, anonymous and quality information on the deeply sensitive topics they may wonder about but feel unsafe discussing face-to-face. By dialling the tollfree number '120,' all adolescents and youth around the country with access to a phone can receive judgement-free counselling and referrals from trained professionals. Topics include general health; safe sex; family planning; harmful effects of early, child, and forced marriages; gender-based violence; sexually transmitted infections; LGBTQI; alcohol and drug use; mental health and suicidal thoughts; and now COVID-19.
- In 2019 alone, the Youth Health Line received 130,000 calls from young people with nowhere else to turn for guidance on these culturally taboo, yet life-altering topics.
- A bonus is the invaluable data Youth Health Line generates. Anonymous data about the issues adolescents and youth are facing help the Government, UNFPA, and partners better understand and address their health and social needs through evidence-based policies and programmes.
- UNFPA developed Youth Health Line in 2012 with the Ministry of Public Health's Adolescent Directorate. UNFPA provides financial and technical support, including data analysis. Youth Health Line is operated by an implementing partner, Afghan Family Guidance Association. The Ministry of Information and Culture's Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs is involved with the monitoring component of Youth Health Line.

- **Youth Health Corners and Pre-marriage Counselling, a UNFPA flagship programme**

- Located within public health facilities in seven provinces of Afghanistan, Youth Health Corners are safe spaces for adolescents and youth to consult and receive treatment from specially trained male and female health workers about sensitive issues related to sexual and reproductive health.
- In addition to these services, once per month Youth Health Corners offer Pre-marriage Counselling sessions for small groups of young women and men who are engaged to be married, segregated by gender. The sessions are delivered by male and female doctors of the same gender, as well as one of Afghanistan's most famous religious leaders. They teach Islamic marriage principles; healthy and gender-equitable relationship habits; sexual health best practices; family planning tools; parenting, communication and conflict resolution skills; and in a very sensitive manner, sexual relations information.

- Youth Health Corners are cost-effective and sustainable in that they leverage existing health facilities and staff, minimising expenditures. The model distinguishes itself from the majority of services in Afghanistan that are reactive; instead, Pre-marriage Counselling aims to proactively prevent the problems that arise from inadequate sexual and reproductive health services and unequal gender roles in relationships.
  - The impact of the Youth Health Corners extends beyond the clients themselves. Topics explored at the Youth Health Corners are often later discussed with family or friends, helping to desensitise sexual and reproductive health issues and promote gender equality in the wider community.
  - Piloted in 2018, the Youth Health Corners programme was developed and is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Health's Adolescent Directorate. Pre-marriage Counselling was launched in 2019.
- **School Health Worker Volunteers**
    - In seven provinces of Afghanistan, UNFPA has worked with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health to bring basic health services and referral capacity directly into public schools. Trusted teachers are selected based on their medical backgrounds, time, dedication and/or report with students. These volunteers are trained to administer basic first aid and provide sexual and reproductive health guidance, and when needed, external referrals. As a result, public school students will live healthier lives, better enabling them to reach their full potential.
    - UNFPA provides technical assistance to the Ministry of Education for the development, implementation and monitoring of this flagship programme. UNFPA is also supporting the Ministry of Education to develop an action plan for school health as an active member of a core committee focused on this topic.
- **Youth Peer Network**
    - To provide sexual and reproductive health and rights information to the large portion of adolescents and youth in Afghanistan who are not enrolled in schools, UNFPA developed the Youth Peer Network. Serving seven provinces, this network incentivises youth to attend information sessions about sexual and reproductive health and rights—and then to share what they learn with other young people in their communities. Additional topics like drug use and HIV are covered too, in an engaging way.
    - UNFPA provides the Ministry of Public Health technical and operational support for the Youth Peer Network programme.

# HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

## Humanitarian Affairs: The Situation

Humanitarian crises inflate the impacts of gender inequality and other inequities, generally harming most the furthest behind; women and children are especially vulnerable to the fallout from these crises. Ongoing conflicts and periodic natural disasters create a continuous demand for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, particularly in remote and border regions of the country.

In crisis situations, already scarce services and resources tend to collapse and deplete. The results are harrowing. In addition to concerns around food and shelter, rates of gender-based violence rise, as do harmful practices such as forced marriage; contraceptives are even harder to access; and risks associated with pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections are elevated. Reduced availability of skilled birth attendants and health facility capacity means more women and children die during childbirth.

As of 2019, there were an estimated 6.3 million people in need of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Half are women and girls.<sup>26</sup>

## UNFPA Afghanistan's Support to Individuals and Host Communities Impacted by Humanitarian Crises

UNFPA works with the Government of Afghanistan and other partners to provide a range of services during humanitarian crises, especially targeting the furthest behind, including women, adolescents, youth, children, and gender-based violence survivors. Relief efforts are prioritised to support Afghan refugees who have returned to Afghanistan, internally displaced persons, and host communities of newcomers.

UNFPA's Afghanistan's humanitarian programming cuts across the organisation, with close involvement in initiatives such as the Family Protection Centres, Women Friendly Safe Spaces, and Youth Health Corners. The humanitarian programmes aim to consult and reflect the needs, desires, and concerns of the people it serves in the decision-making process.

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<sup>26</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan, 2019



The work of UNFPA Afghanistan's Humanitarian Unit is summarised below.

## UNFPA Solutions for Humanitarian Crises in Afghanistan

### Services

- **Emergency Reproductive Health Kits and Dignity Kits**
  - UNFPA believes that all women and girls have an equal right to dignity and self-respect, including access to basic health and hygiene resources, especially in the most adverse of situations. To fulfil these needs, UNFPA distributes Emergency Reproductive Health Kits to hospitals and health centres affected by crises to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services are provided during humanitarian emergencies.
  - UNFPA also distributes Dignity Kits to women and girls of reproductive age in humanitarian settings. Dignity Kits are comprised of culturally sensitive items like toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, sanitary pads, underclothes and blankets. To ensure the kits are responsive to local needs, in 2016 UNFPA conducted a survey with Dignity Kit recipients and subsequently adapted their contents accordingly. To address the rapidly escalating COVID-19 crisis, UNFPA added items such as hand sanitiser to help keep the beneficiaries—women and girls—safe and healthy. And Dignity Kits are used to disseminate information about locally available gender-based violence response services.
  - Since January 2018, 17,833 Dignity Kits have been distributed to women and girls displaced or otherwise impacted by floods, droughts, conflict, and most recently, COVID-19.



- **Mobile Health Teams and Related Efforts**

- UNFPA oversees a mobile health programme to quickly respond to basic yet essential needs during humanitarian crises throughout the country. The Mobile Health Teams travel to remote areas in conflict zones and other emergency settings to administer a range of services, for example midwifery and contraception, psychosocial support and referrals to better equipped health facilities or Family Protection Centres when gender-based violence is detected. Under the direction of Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health and with oversight from UNFPA, four Mobile Health Teams operate in Nangrahar, Kunar and Laghman provinces. UNFPA also provides technical support and resources to five ‘transient’ and ‘static’ health facilities near critical border crossings with Iran and Pakistan.
- Additionally, UNFPA supports 10 mobile health units operated by the Afghan Red Crescent Society, primarily via deployment of trained midwives and Emergency Reproductive Health Kits.

# POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

## Population and Development: The Situation

Data helps countries understand precisely who is furthest behind and what needs to be done so they can reach their full potential. Reliable and timely data is fundamental to measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of national strategies and action plans. Without population data, it would be impossible to achieve UNFPA's transformational results of zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls. High quality, disaggregated population data is essential to inform effective development planning so policies and programmes meet the needs of all Afghan people.

Collecting good data is challenging anywhere, but it is made even more difficult in areas that are hard to access due to security and infrastructure issues. In Afghanistan, both are significant obstacles complicating regular and comprehensive data collection.

## UNFPA Afghanistan's Investments to Generate Reliable and Robust Population Data

UNFPA plays a key role in supporting large-scale data projects in Afghanistan, including censuses and socio-demographic, economic and health surveys. UNFPA's Population and Development Unit provides institutional capacity building to the Government's National Statistics and Information Authority—the only entity authorised to generate national statistics information. This support includes technical guidance for the planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, and use of data.

The Population and Development Unit is an integral convergence point between all UNFPA programme units—supporting data needs to improve sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, adolescent and youth empowerment, and humanitarian affairs—to help achieve UNFPA's Transformative Results.

The work of UNFPA Afghanistan's Population and Development Unit is summarised here.

## UNFPA Solutions for Comprehensive Population and Development Information in Afghanistan

### Policy advocacy

- **National Population Policy**
  - In 2017, UNFPA coordinated development of Afghanistan's first National Population Policy and provided technical guidance to the Ministry of Economy. The policy intends to increase the efficiency, accuracy and success of development planning. It is currently undergoing approval by the Consular of Ministries.

- **Sustainable Development Goals localisation and monitoring**
  - UNFPA is closely involved with processes to localise the Sustainable Development Goals to the Afghanistan context. UNFPA is also working with the Government to ensure monitoring and evaluation frameworks are in place.
- **Afghanistan Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development**
  - UNFPA helped design the structure for the Afghanistan Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development, including setting up a project coordinator's office and developing a strategic plan, manual, terms of reference, materials and a schedule of advocacy activities.
  - The Forum connects the three pillars of government—executive, legislative and legal—to problem-solve population and development related issues. It also advocates for the use of population data, and for reproductive health and youth rights, so that national policies, legislation and plans are more effective. The Forum has a vision of streamlining these areas of focus and advancing population and development issues within the parliamentary functions of legislation, appropriation, oversight and constituency mobilisation.

### Institutional capacity building and other services

- **Kabul University Master of Demography degree programme**
  - UNFPA is coordinating the creation of the first Master of Demography degree programme in Afghanistan, which will be offered at Kabul University. In collaboration with Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand, the curriculum will be developed by 2021. Generating a workforce of skilled Afghan demographers is a sustainable approach to increasing the availability of high-quality data.
- **2011-2019 Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey**
  - Between 2011-2019, UNFPA's Population and Development Unit provided technical support to help Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority conduct its first-ever Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey. The survey filled a long-standing void in population data—the last census took place in 1979.
  - The Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey gathered reliable data at the national, provincial, district and village levels from 13 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. It is important to have data from all these levels to establish effective governance systems that serve all Afghans, as well as to inform population and electoral registries. The data enable evidence-based, localised policy development, planning and budgeting.

- The survey collected sex- and district-disaggregated data on topics like:



- Due to the deteriorating security situation and financial resources, the survey could not cover all provinces.
- **Survey Control Room**
  - In 2020, Afghanistan’s National Statistics and Information Authority requested that UNFPA establish a Survey Control Room where statistics officers receive technical training and troubleshooting support during data collection and analysis for various surveys, such as the next Demographic and Health Survey.
- **Innovation Lab**
  - In 2019, UNFPA established a geographic information system (GIS) and innovation lab for the National Statistics and Information Authority. Here, statistics officers have access to state-of-the-art demography hardware and software, such as GIS mapping tools. UNFPA also conducts trainings on these tools.
- **Population estimation through the use of remote-sensing technology**
  - Alongside the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Flowminder, UNFPA completed the first phase of an exciting project that uses new statistical methods and existing survey, satellite and mobile data to generate large-scale population and development estimates. Through complex modelling based on available information and imaging technology, the cutting-edge approach has potential to accurately predict population data disaggregated by age and sex groups for the whole country. In settings prone to conflict and infrastructure issues, this is a game-changing solution to otherwise intractable data challenges.

## COVID-19: CONTINUING TO SERVE VULNERABLE WOMEN, ADOLESCENTS, AND YOUTH

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the delivery of UNFPA's life-saving and life-changing services more complex—but also more necessary than ever. UNFPA's teams and implementing partners are getting creative to ensure our programmes and referral networks continue to serve women and their young children, adolescents, and youth, including those who are the hardest to reach.

UNFPA took early action to put in place COVID-19 transmission prevention measures, based on the World Health Organization guidelines, so all UNFPA staff and affiliated service providers have the latest information regarding COVID-19. Whenever possible, digital platforms are leveraged, and in settings without access to virtual services, providers follow physical distancing protocols. For those who deliver essential in-person support, they are equipped with hand sanitisers and personal protective equipment to prevent the disease's spread.

Our programmes inform individuals on how to keep themselves, their loved ones, and communities safe. For example, UNFPA's flagship programmes—Youth Health Line, Youth Health Corners, Family Protection Centres, and Family Health Houses—and UNFPA's humanitarian response programmes all promote transmission-prevention best practices with the women, adolescents, and youth who utilise these services. The contents of the Dignity Kits, which are distributed to women living in humanitarian settings, have been expanded to include items such as hand sanitiser.

**UNFPA urgently seeks funding to enable adaptation, continuity, and scaling up of these essential services.** Learn how you can help below.

### Join UNFPA to Help the Most Vulnerable People in Afghanistan Thrive

Afghanistan has a rare opportunity to leverage the potential of its vast youth population to rapidly accelerate social and economic development, shaping a future in which all Afghans have the chance to live healthy, happy, and productive lives. But to make this prospect a reality, we need to double down on our investments.

## This Must Not Wait. The Time Is Now.

UNFPA's programmes offer concrete and actionable solutions to help all Afghans enjoy their rights and dignity, which are fundamental precursors and drivers of prosperity. Specifically, we invest in core areas to:

- Fulfil sexual and reproductive health needs, including improving maternal and newborn health, especially among women and young people in rural and disaster-affected areas;
- Help women and girls experiencing gender-based violence and harmful practices with the intent to ultimately work towards ending these human rights violations; and
- Equip young people with tools and opportunities to become the inspiring and respected leaders of tomorrow.

## But We Cannot Do It Alone.

UNFPA invites policymakers and government officials, donors, and private sector, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, and civil society groups to partner with us.

We welcome partnerships to enhance our collective impact, whether through:

- **Policy action and government ownership** to support the success and longevity of UNFPA programmes.
- **Funding and in-kind support** so UNFPA programmes reach more people in more places. With COVID-19, this need is greater than ever. We urgently seek financial resources to support adaptation and scaling up of our programmes in response to the rapidly growing need for gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive and health services.
- **South-South collaboration** for shared learning, strengthening of referral networks, and leveraging of efforts to achieve complementary goals.

**Help strengthen, scale and replicate our programmes for a country—and world—in which every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.**



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## **UNFPA Afghanistan** **Country Programme Overview**



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