



United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

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Factsheet on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan

- **Life expectancy** – 44 years, one of lowest in the world, some 20 years short of global average; “women in Afghanistan die at a younger age than men” notwithstanding high level of male casualties in armed conflict.”¹
- **Sex ratio:** 2005 UNDP study reveals there are 102 women for every 100 men in Afghanistan.²
- **Maternal mortality rate** – second-highest in the world;³ one woman dies every 27 minutes due to pregnancy-related conditions – around 25,000 deaths per annum. With proper access to health facilities most deaths could be prevented. Over **70%** of births take place at homes without medical support. **Only 20%**, mostly complicated births, are referred to hospitals.⁴ Advancements have been seen in health sector since fall of Taliban regime, i.e. number of midwives and female nurses has increased from about 100, to more than 2,400.⁵
- **Adult literacy rate** – for Afghans aged over 15 years is **28%** including **12.6% for females**.⁶ In rural areas, where 74% of Afghans reside, it is estimated that **90% of women cannot read or write**.⁷ A total of 300,000 women are attending literacy courses in different provinces of country. In 2008, 75% of literacy students were women who gained literacy.⁸

¹ National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAWPA), 2008-2018, page 1

² UNDP_ World Population Prospects_2006 (International Estimate),
<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=GenderStat&f=inID%3A8>

³ Ratio of 1,600 per 100,000 live births, see: Human Development Report 2007/2008

⁴ National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (A) of the annex to human rights council resolution 5/1, General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/5/AFG/1, 24 February 2009
(http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session5/AF/A_HRC_WG6_5_AFG_1_E.pdf)

⁵ Women's Health at Center of Development, Security Goals in Afghanistan, VOA News by Gabe Joselow, Washington, July 14, 2009. Accessible at <http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

⁶ See, Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007

⁷ UNAMA press conference at launch of *Education for All, Global Action Week*, 20 April 2009, see: <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1761&ctl=Details&mid=1892&ItemID=3584>

⁸ National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (A) of the annex to human rights council resolution 5/1, General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/5/AFG/1, 24 February 2009
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⁸ Women's Health at Center of Development, Security Goals in Afghanistan, VOA News by Gabe Joselow, Washington, July 14, 2009. Accessible at <http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

- **Net enrolment ratio in schools** – number of students in primary and secondary education is 6,139,101 – with girls numbering 2,191,046, 1.7 million girls study in primary schools across Afghanistan.⁹ Boys make up two-thirds of the student population.¹⁰ Disaggregated data on school enrolment reveals that figures vary across the country; in certain areas enrolment is much higher for boys (i.e. in Uruzgan net primary school enrolment ratio is 64.93% for boys and 9.85% for girls (total 38.60%).¹¹
- **Female teachers** – 28.1% (GoA target to increase this to 50%).
- **Higher education:** Only 34% of female government employees have attained higher education compared with 66% of male employees.¹²
- **Women in government:** of 221,684 state employees, 47,790 are women (excluding ministry of interior and defence).¹³ Women account for 22% of all civil servants – **this ratio is steadily decreasing**. In 2005, 31% of regular government employees were women. In 2006, the number dropped to 22%.¹⁴
- **Contract workers:** In 2005, there were 88,438 government contract workers in the country. Between 2005 and 2006, the number of female workers decreased from 7,758 (10.3%) to 6,585 (7.5%).¹⁵
- **Women in justice sector:** Of 1,652 judges working in military and civil courts, 189 or 5.4% are women. Of 1,095 prosecutors employed by AG's office, 103 (9.4%) are women.¹⁶
- **Political participation** – Women constitute 25% of the National Assembly, 64 of 249 MPs are women. Afghanistan is ranked 20th in the world for female representation in parliament.¹⁷ This figure is however not an indication of enhanced participation of women in parliament. Of 18 ministries in Afghanistan, only one is headed by a woman – the Ministry of Women's Affairs.
- **Female registration:** The number of Afghans registered as voters totalled 1,733,885. Of these 1,229,568 are men and 504,287 are women – 29% women and 71% men.¹⁸ In the presidential elections of 2004, out of the total of 10,567,834 eligible voters, 4,359,651 were women (41%) and the remaining 6,208,183 were men (59%).¹⁹

⁹ UNAMA photo of the day, Studying in the open, 16 July 2009

¹⁰ see: <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1761&ctl=Details&mid=1892&ItemID=3584>

¹¹ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, 1386 (2007) Schools Survey Summary Report, published January 2008.

¹² UNIFEM Afghanistan: <http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/prog/MOWA/civilservice.html>

¹³ National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (A) of the annex to human rights council resolution 5/1, General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/5/AFG/1, 24 February 2009

(http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session5/AF/A_HRC_WG6_5_AFG_1_E.pdf)

¹⁴ UNIFEM Afghanistan: <http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/prog/MOWA/civilservice.html>

¹⁵ UNIFEM Afghanistan: <http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/prog/MOWA/civilservice.html>

¹⁶ National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (A) of the annex to human rights council resolution 5/1, General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/5/AFG/1, 24 February 2009

(http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session5/AF/A_HRC_WG6_5_AFG_1_E.pdf)

¹⁷ UNIFEM Gender statistic brochure accessible at

http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/docs/pubs/07/gender_statistics_brochure.pdf

¹⁸ United Nations News Letter,

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/afghanistan/infocusnews.asp?NewsID=710&sID=1>

¹⁹ National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 (A) of the annex to human rights council resolution 5/1, General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/5/AFG/1, 24 February 2009

(http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session5/AF/A_HRC_WG6_5_AFG_1_E.pdf)

- **Widows:** Afghanistan has around 1 million widows – average age 35 years, 94% are illiterate. Around 90% have child dependents; many have no source of income.²⁰
 - **Female headed households:** Around 2% - considerable no. have no income earner.²¹
 - **Forced- underage marriage:** According to the AIHRC, 60 to 80% of all marriages are forced and under-age. Approximately 57% of girls marry before the age of 16 due to customary practices (legal age for marriage is 16).²²
 - **Internal displacement:** more than 235,000, including women and children. According to UNHCR, more than 276,000 Afghan refugees living in Iran and Pakistan returned home in 2008.²³
 - **Business Owners 5%** – Various factors, cultural and social, deter women.
 - **Rights to inheritance** – often denied either on cultural or religious grounds.
 - **Civilian casualties** – 56 women have died in the first 5 months Jan-May 09
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²⁰ UNIFEM Gender statistic brochure accessible at http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/docs/pubs/07/gender_statistics_brochure.pdf

²¹ Ibid

²² Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Justice Sector Strategy, June 2008, p. 1, also available at Afghanistan Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review, Fifth session of the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council, May 2009, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA11/014/2008/en/b5f04b18-ab50-11dd-a4cd-bfa0fdea9647/asa110142008en.pdf>

²³ Amnesty International Report 2009, available at <http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/asia-pacific/afghanistan>