



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Central Statistics Organization



AFGHANISTAN LIVING CONDITIONS SURVEY 2016 - 2017



Highlights Report



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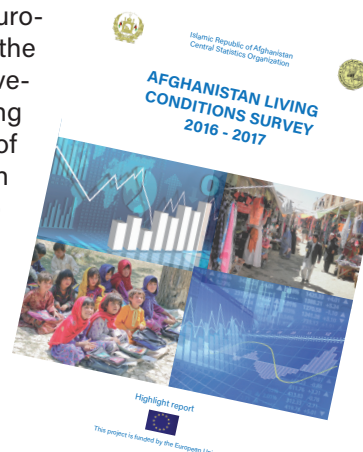
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FOREWORD

The present Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS), conducted by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) and financially supported by the European Commission, is the sixth round of data collection since the start of the survey in 2003. The history of the ALCS has seen an enlargement of coverage of development themes that are crucial for the development planning of Afghanistan, while maintaining a balance in the details and periodicity of reporting that are relevant for the large number of stakeholders involved in and benefiting from the survey. At the same time, the ALCS has been able to accommodate international standards and methodologies to produce internationally comparable indicators and to improve the quality and speed of reporting. The release of the ALCS 2016-17 report almost exactly one year after the completion of the data collection is an achievement that is hardly ever met by surveys of similar coverage and complexity. In addition, the history of the ALCS is also the account of building CSO's capacity in data collection, survey management, data processing and analysis, and I am proud of the efforts and skills demonstrated by the staff of CSO involved in the present survey.



The ALCS is the flagship of the Central Statistics Organization. Several features make the ALCS a unique instrument for policy makers and all the national and international organisations investing in the future of the country. These features include the coverage of the nomadic Kuchi population, the ability to capture seasonal variation in relevant development indicators, the ability to produce statistics at provincial level, the continuity of the survey that allows making trend analyses of key development indicators, the large number of stakeholders benefitting from the survey results and the survey's flexibility to adapt to Afghanistan's needs.

The present highlights report contains the main information about population and households, labour market, poverty, food security, agriculture, health, education, housing, gender and the challenges faced by Afghanistan's households, their coping strategies and people's priorities for development.

As President General of the national statistical organisation, I am also very proud that Afghanistan is one of the first countries in the world to produce official Sustainable Development Goals indicators. The present round of the ALCS produced no less than 20 indicators for 12 of the 17 SDGs, some of which are presented in this highlights report.

This highlights report is only presenting a small share of the information that is available in the full analysis report and I believe that the readers of this report will be interested to complement the information contained here with complementary information from the full analysis report.

Jawed Rasooli
President General
Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan
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Introduction

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) is the longest-running and most comprehensive source of information about the social and economic situation of people in Afghanistan. With the results of the successive surveys, the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan has provided the Government of Afghanistan, civil society, researchers and the international community with an increasingly wide array of national development indicators and statistics. The survey produces information at national and provincial level, tracks seasonality of indicators and is the only national survey that include Afghanistan's nomadic Kuchi population.

Up to the present ALCS 2016-17, the successive surveys have recorded significant improvements in many development indicators (including, education, health, water and sanitation), while other indicators (e.g. employment, poverty and food-security) have fluctuated over time. Alongside a continued improvement on some indicators, the present results indicate stagnation for many others and a sharp deterioration for poverty and food-security. Consequently, the tone of ALCS reporting is less optimistic than before.

A number of the negative changes can be attributed to the deterioration in Afghanistan's macro-economic and security situation since the previous ALCS in 2013-14. Another, more structural, factor is the unsustainably high population growth: more and more people are reaching working age and entering the labour force, while the capacity of the labour market to provide jobs for them cannot keep up. The rapid population growth also puts pressure on the education and health systems and on the amount of available arable land.

Afghanistan was one of the 193 countries to endorse the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. This fifteen-year agenda (2015-2030) replaces the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework and guides the international community to achieve three main objectives: end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect the planet. The ALCS will be one of the main sources for monitoring the implementation of the SDG agenda in Afghanistan. The ALCS 2016-17 covered 20 indicators for 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most of which are presented in this report. Subsequent survey rounds will extend the coverage of SDG indicators.

This Highlights Report presents the key findings of the ALCS 2016-17, covering 45 development indicators, of which 15 SDG indicators.¹ Disaggregated and detailed results, more in-depth analysis and a large number of additional indicators will be provided in the ALCS Analysis Report that will be published in April 2018.

¹ The results presented in this Highlights Report should be considered as preliminary. The Analysis Report will present the final results, which may in some instances deviate slightly from the present results.

Key indicators

Indicator	SDG indicator	Value
Population under age 15 (percent)		47.7
Dependency ratio		101
Average household size		7.7
Percentage of women aged 20-24 married at age 18	5.3.1	28.3
Labour force participation rate (percent)		53.9
Employment-to-population ratio (percent)		41.0
Unemployment rate (percent)		23.9
Youth unemployment rate (percent)		30.7
Underemployment rate, as percentage of the labour force		23.9
Share of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET) (percent)	8.6.1	42.0
Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment (percent) (proxy indicator)	8.5.3	66.7
Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment (percent)		80.2
Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment (percent)	9.2.2	18.1
Proportion of population living below the national poverty line (percent)	1.2.1	54.5
Poverty gap (percent)		15.0
Gini index		0.31
Percentage of food-insecure population		44.6
Net attendance rate in primary education (percent)		56.1
Net attendance rate in secondary education (percent)		35.7
Net attendance rate in tertiary education (percent)		9.7
Gross attendance ratio in primary education		72.5
Gross attendance ratio in secondary education		48.0
Gross attendance ratio in tertiary education		14.1
Participation rate of youth in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months (percent)	4.3.1	31.4
Adult literacy rate (15 years of age and over) (percent)		34.8
Youth literacy rate (15-24 years of age) (percent)		53.6
Ante-natal care coverage (at least one visit) (percent)		70.0
Ante-natal care coverage (at least four visits) (percent)		16.3
Percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel (percent)	3.1.2	53.4
Disability prevalence rate (percent)		3.2
Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (percent)	11.1.1	72.4

Proportion of population with access to electricity (percent)	71.1	97.7
Proportion of population using safely-managed drinking water services (percent) (proxy indicator) ^a (percent)	6.1.1	36.0
Proportion of population using safely-managed sanitation services (basic services) (percent) (proxy indicator) ^b (percent)	6.2.1	41.4
Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (percent) – for cooking (percent)	71.2	25.2
Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (percent) – for heating (percent)	71.2	4.2
Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone (percent)	5.b.1	43.3
Internet users per 100 population		3.9
Proportion of women in managerial positions (percent)	5.5.2	4.3
Gender parity index of gross primary attendance ratios		0.71
Gender parity index of gross secondary attendance ratios		0.51
Gender parity index of gross tertiary attendance ratios		0.39
Adult literacy gender parity index (age 15 and over)		0.40
Youth literacy gender parity index (age 15-24)		0.57
Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority (percent)	16.9.1	29.5

^a Proxy indicator, not considering possible water contamination prior consumption.

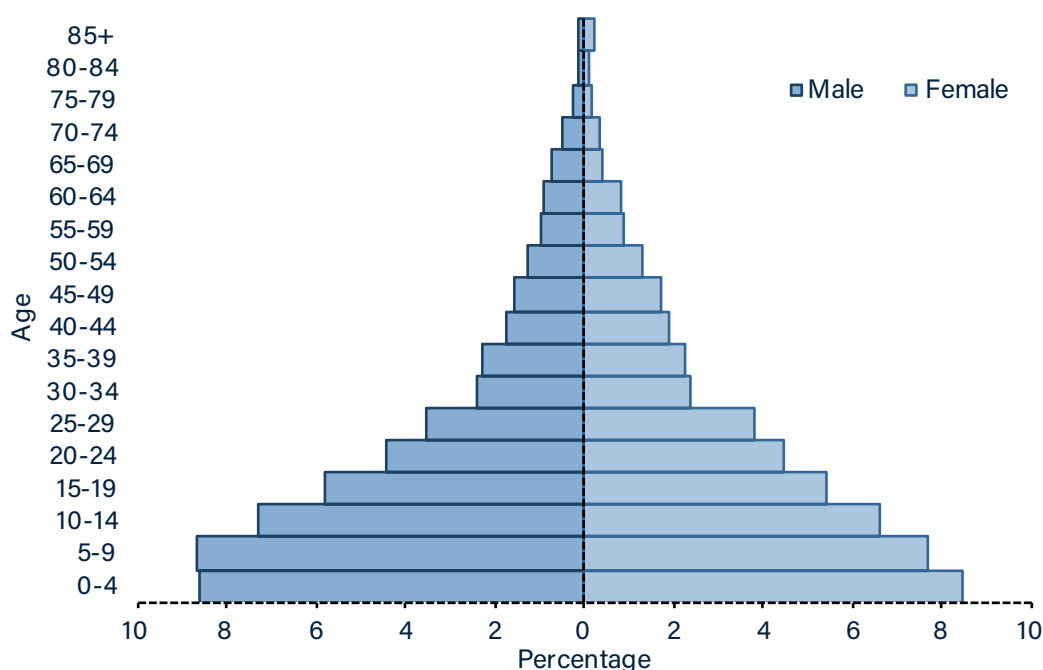
^b Proxy indicator, not considering the management of excreta.

Survey findings

Population and households

Afghanistan's population has a very young age structure (*Figure 1*). Almost half of the population – 48 percent – consists of children under age 15, a figure that would place Afghanistan among the four countries in the world with the highest proportion persons under-15. This confirms national and international estimates of very high fertility and population growth in the country, which are consistently among the highest in the world. Because of its young population, the dependency ratio² is at the very high level of 101, implying that 100 people of the principal income-earning ages 15 to 64 must provide for as many as 101 dependent young (below 15) and older (65 and over) persons. Such a high ratio implies a serious impediment for economic development, as on the one hand scarce resources have to be spend on the young population's education, health care and social development, and on the other hand only a relative small proportion of the population is available for economic productive activities. Similarly, at the household level, relatively few people are available for income activities and the limited resources need to be shared with many household members, reducing investments in education, health and other personal development.

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



The average household size in Afghanistan is 7.7 persons. Half of the population lives in households with nine or more people. Some 44 percent live in overcrowded dwellings – defined as housing with more than three persons per room – that expose household members to unhealthy and socially undesirable conditions.

2 The age dependency ratio is the ratio of people in dependent ages (younger than 15 or older than 64) to the population of principal working age, those aged 15-64.

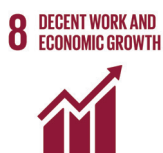


Marriage is almost universal in Afghanistan. Above age 40, less than one percent of men and women remain unmarried. Some 8 percent of married women in Afghanistan live in a polygamous marriage. Child marriage remains widespread in the country, especially for girls. Child marriage often compromises a girl's development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling and limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement.

It is also considered a direct manifestation of gender inequality and for that reason it is included in the set of SDG indicators for gender equality. According to ALCS 2016-17, 28 percent of women currently aged 20-24 were married before age 18 and 4 percent even before age 15 (SDG indicator 5.3.1).

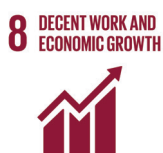
Kabul province – and more specifically, the capital – stands out as the main gravitational centre for migrants in the country, both for those who move internally and for those returning from abroad. More than one third of Kabul residents were born abroad or elsewhere in Afghanistan. The province hosts more than half of all migrants in the country who moved since birth. Secondary magnets of attraction are Balkh, Herat and Kandahar. Overall, living conditions of migrants tend to be somewhat better than those of non-migrants, as suggested by a lower poverty rate and higher literacy- and labour-force participation rates. This also applies to migrants who return from displacement, but only for those who return from abroad and not for those who were internally displaced.

Labour characteristics



The analysis of ALCS data suggests that Afghanistan's labour market is under considerable stress. Almost one quarter – 24 percent – of the country's labour force is unemployed (SDG indicator 8.5.2). It would be a serious misunderstanding to think that unemployment is the only, perhaps even the main, problem of the labour market. At least as important is the generally poor quality of work that is available, as it often involves low-productivity and low-paid jobs. Of the

total employed population, 20 percent are under-employed (in need of more work). Moreover, 80 percent of all jobs are classified as vulnerable employment, characterised by job insecurity and poor working conditions, and 67 percent of jobs in non-agricultural employment is informal employment (SDG indicator 8.5.3). Only 13 percent of the working population of Afghanistan can be considered to have decent employment. The low quality of work is also evidenced by the finding that the poverty rate of fully-employed people is hardly lower than that of the unemployed and that poverty among the under-employed is even higher than that of the unemployed. The key message here is that next to the need of jobs for a large number of unemployed, an even far larger number of working people is in need of decent jobs in order to escape poverty.



The proportion of youth 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) (SDG indicator 8.6.1) captures the share of young people who are not working, but who are also not gaining relevant labour-market skills and may suffer from erosion of competences. This indicator thus provides a measure of youth who are at especially high risk of labour-market and social exclusion. The NEET rate is estimated at 42 percent for both sexes combined, but is especially high for

young females. Job opportunities for young people are particularly scarce, with the youth unemployment rate³ standing as high as 31 percent. Again, unemployment levels of young females far surpass that of their male peers. The very high population growth factors-in here, as the ever-increasing cohorts that reach working age also put an unabated pressure on the

3 The unemployment rate of persons aged 15-24.

labour market. An expected 3.9 million young people will reach working age over the next five years, of whom 1.6 million will enter the labour market out of whom some 540 thousand will remain unemployed according to the present rates of labour force participation and unemployment.

The overall labour force participation rate is relatively low at 54 percent, as is the national employment-to-population ratio⁴ of 41 percent. These figures imply that relative to the total population, the volume of human resources available to produce goods and services is small, greatly hampering further economic development. The main factor underlying these low figures is the very low female participation in economic activities.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

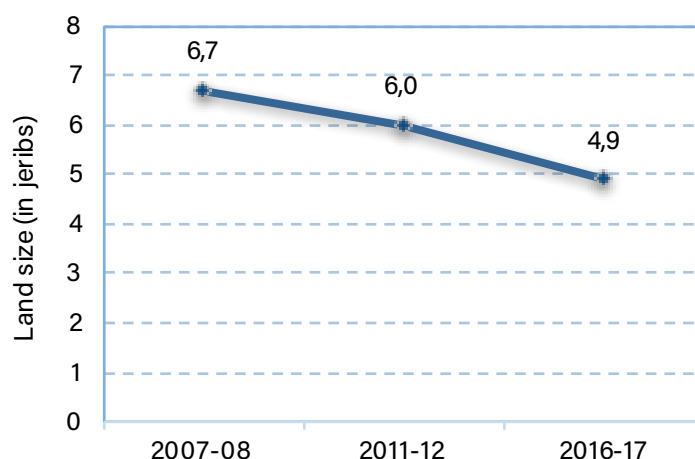


Employment in agriculture dominates the labour market of Afghanistan: 44 percent of all jobs are in the agriculture sector and 43 percent of all workers are agricultural workers. Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment (SDG indicator 9.2.2) remains at a low 18 percent, indicating that the transition to a more advanced and resilient economy is still in an initial stage.

Agriculture

The main capital of farmers is arable land and in Afghanistan particularly irrigated land, as this is far more productive than rain-fed land. Land ownership is under high pressure by population growth, resulting in land fragmentation. Analysis of successive surveys indicate that the average owned irrigated land size decreased from 6.7 jeribs (1.3 ha.) in 2007-08 to 4.9 jeribs (1.0 ha.) in 2016-17, thereby jeopardising the livelihoods of many farming households (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2: Average irrigated land size of households owning irrigated land, by survey year (in jeribs)^a



^a One jerib is 0.2 ha.

Poverty

1 NO POVERTY



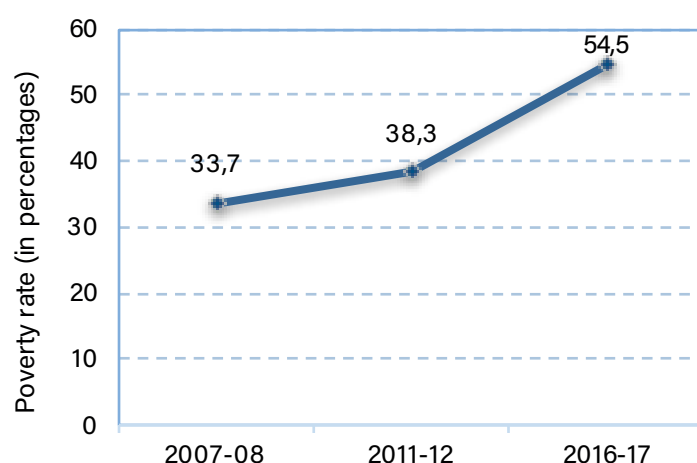
The ALCS 2016-17 recorded a sharp deterioration in welfare of the Afghan population. The proportion of population living below the national poverty line (SDG indicator 1.2.1) increased from 34 percent in 2007-08 to 55 percent in 2016-17 (*Figure 3*). The increase in the poverty rate is experienced across the country and is present in urban, as well as in rural areas. Results from ALCS

⁴ The proportion of the working-age population that is employed.

2013-14⁵ indicated that most of the increase occurred in the interval between the last two surveys. They also showed that not only the share of poor people among the general population increased, but also the depth or intensity of poverty. The measure for the intensity of poverty – the poverty gap ratio⁶ – more than doubled between 2007-08 and 2016-17, increasing from 7.2 to 15.0 percent.

The latest poverty figures imply that at the time of the survey, close to 16 million Afghans lived in poverty. The adverse effects of high fertility on household welfare is clearly shown in the much higher poverty rates among large households and households with relatively many children. On the other hand, education and literacy have a favourable effect on household welfare. While unemployment of the head of household is correlated with higher poverty, his (or her) employment is no guarantee against poverty: more than half of the households with a fully-employed household head lives below the poverty line and those with under-employed heads are even more often poor than those with unemployed heads.

Figure 3: Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by survey year
(in percentages)



The loss of wealth among the most affluent 20 percent of the population has been more pronounced than that at the bottom of the wealth distribution. This implies that, although poverty has increased, inequality in the country has declined. The Gini index is a key indicator for inequality in wealth and measures the extent to which the distribution of wealth among individuals or households differs from a perfectly equal one.⁷ The Gini index for Afghanistan showed a small decrease between the surveys of 2011-12 and 2016-17, from 0.30 to 0.29.

Food security

Food security was measured by the MDG indicator 1.9 (the proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption). Available data for this indicator from previous surveys allows the presentation of the trend in food security. According to this indicator, food insecurity went up from 30 percent in 2011-12 to 45 percent in the current survey. Some 13

5 Results of ALCS 2013-14 are not entirely comparable with those of ALCS 2016-17 and are therefore not reported here.

6 The poverty gap measures the intensity of poverty as the average distance between the per-capita expenditure levels of the population and the poverty line – assuming the non-poor have a zero shortfall – and is expressed as a percentage of the poverty line.

7 The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of consumption among individuals or households differs from a perfectly equal one. A value of 0 represents absolute equality with everybody consuming the same amount, a value of 1 represents absolute inequality, where all consumption is concentrated in one person.

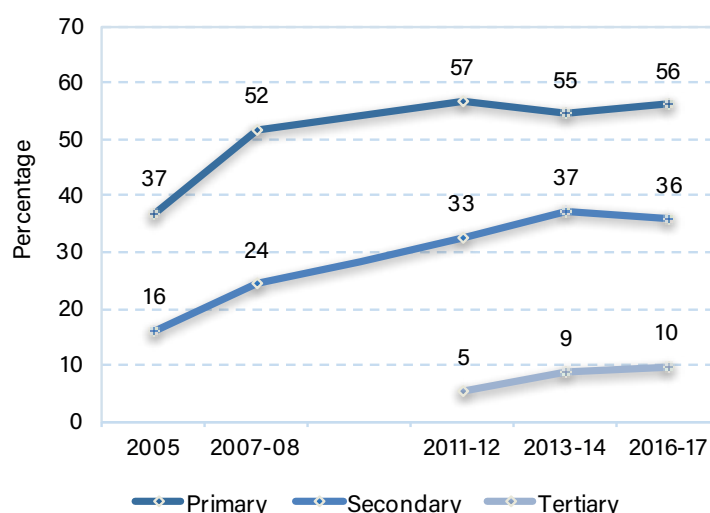
percent of the population are even very severely food insecure.⁸

Apart from insufficient energy intake, close to one third – 30 percent – of the population do not meet the daily protein requirement of at least 50 grams per person per day. Two out of five people – 39 percent of the population – have food consumption with poor dietary diversity, lacking adequate amounts of nutritious items, proteins and micro-nutrients.

Education

The successive ALCS rounds showed significant progress for many education indicators in the first decade after the Taliban regime was moved from power. However, the ALCS 2013-14 indicated a slowdown in this progress and the current ALCS 2016-17 established that further improvements for most education indicators have completely stalled. The net attendance rates for different education levels are presented in *Figure 4*.⁹ A slowdown in improvement is first observed for the attendance rate in primary education (already in 2011-12), then in secondary education and last in tertiary education. It is likely that easy progress could be made in reaching more students in the first stage of rebuilding the education system after 2001, when very few children attended school. Progress is harder when attendance levels have increased, especially if it concerns less accessible areas of the country and populations that resist formal education, particularly education for girls. In addition, it is hard to keep the rate of extension of education facilities in line with the high level of population growth, and even harder to increase coverage. For instance, the number of children that will be of primary-school age in six years time, will be 18 percent larger than the number that is of primary-school age now. Were the education system to achieve universal primary education for this next generation, in six years time primary education needs to expand by this additional 18 percent, on top of 38 percent increase that is required to accommodate the share of primary-school age children that is currently not attending any education.

Figure 4: Net education attendance rate, by level of education, and by survey year (in percentages)



8 Very severely food insecure is defined as a deficit of 600 Kcal in the daily food consumption.

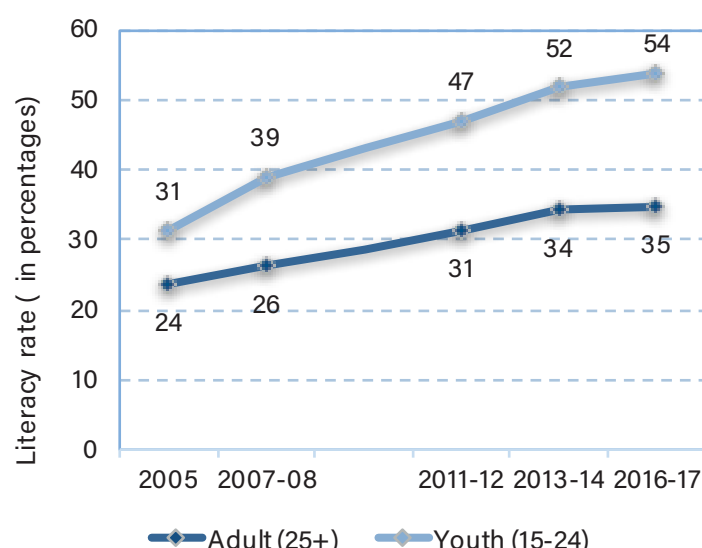
9 The net attendance rate is calculated as the number of pupils of the theoretical school-age group for a specific level of education, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.



The participation rate of youth (aged 15 to 24) in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months is one of the indicators for SDG 4 on education (SDG indicator 4.3.1). The national youth participation rate in education and training is a low 28 percent. As with all other education indicators, this overall figure conceals large differences by residence and sex.

ALCS-based analysis of entry into education, transition in the education system and ending the education career shows that reasons for not starting school are different from those for terminating education. Far distance to school and reluctance to send children to school are by far the most common reasons for not starting school (mentioned for 37 and 25 percent of those who never attended school), whereas the need for child labour and perceived irrelevance of further education were the most important reasons terminating education. One of the most important findings of the ALCS is that – apart from the quality of education, for which the survey does not provide information – the main problem of Afghanistan’s education system is not so much retention and drop out, but first and foremost making a start at school. The cumulative result of the history of education in Afghanistan is that 82 percent of the adult population aged 25 and over has not completed any level of education and only 4 percent completed any level beyond secondary education.

Figure 5: Adult and youth literacy rate, by survey year (in percentages)



The adult literacy rate – referring to the population aged 15 and over – is another indicator that measures the accumulated achievement of the education system. For 2016-17, the adult literacy rate was found to be 35 percent. The youth literacy rate – the literacy rate in the population aged 15-24 – reflects the outcomes of primary education over roughly the previous 10 years and can be seen as a measure of recent educational progress. For Afghanistan, the youth literacy rate was found to be 54 percent, indicating considerable progress. *Figure 5* shows the recorded development of both literacy indicators since 2005.

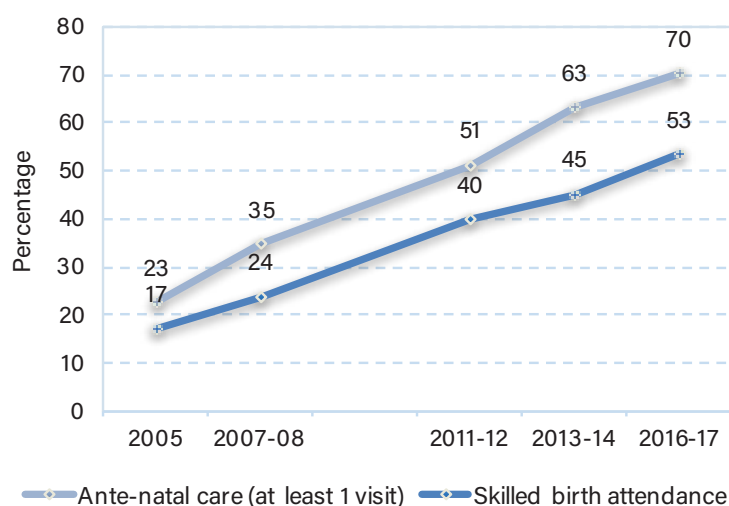
Health



The set of health care indicators that is produced by the ALCS is one for which continuous – and quite impressive – improvement is recorded. Important indicators for maternal and child health include ante-natal examination by a skilled health-care provider and skilled birth attendance. Both timely ante-natal care and skilled birth attendance have shown to be key to bringing down the high levels of maternal and neo-natal mortality. According to ALCS 2016-17, 70 percent of all wo-

men who had a baby during the last five years had at least one ante-natal check-up. However, only 16 percent received four ante-natal check-ups, the number recommended by WHO for normal pregnancies. The percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel increased to 53 percent (SDG indicator 3.1.2). *Figure 6* presents the development of these two indicators between 2005 and 2016-17.

Figure 6: Maternal health indicators, by survey year (in percentages)



Persons with a disability occupy a vulnerable position in Afghan society, but very little information about them is available. The ALCS 2016-17 included a module to assess the disability status of surveyed household members and the ALCS Analysis report will provide detailed information about the population with a disability. The findings indicate that at least 3 percent of the population can be classified as disabled. The disability prevalence by age follows the typical increasing pattern by age, especially after age 50. Around one quarter of the population of age 65 and over is disabled. The most common type of disability relates to functional limitations for moving around (walking, climbing steps), seeing and remembering or concentrating. One third of all disabled persons have more than one disability. Illness, congenital defects and old age are reported as the main causes of disability.

Housing and amenities



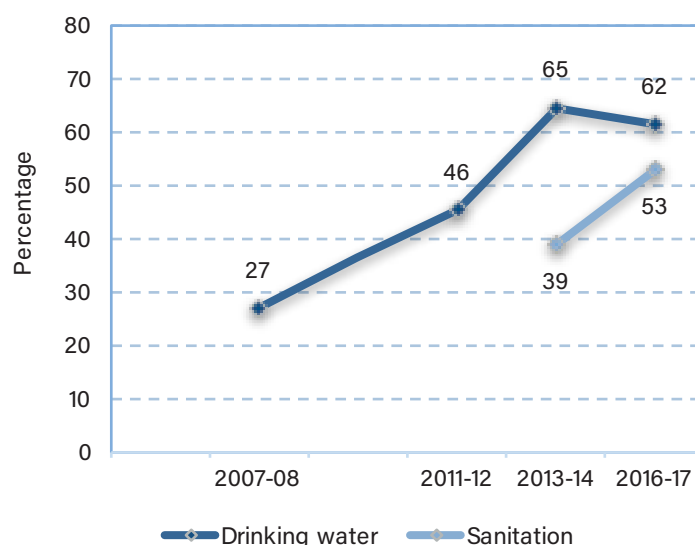
The living conditions of the Afghan population are largely determined by the conditions of housing, including facilities for drinking water and sanitation. Most people – 83 percent – live in dwellings that are constructed with non-durable materials and 44 percent live in conditions of overcrowding, meaning that there are more than three persons per room. The large majority of urban dwellers – 72 percent – live in slums or inadequate housing (SDG indicator 11.1.1).¹⁰

Access to clean water and adequate sanitation and hygiene are key factors in reducing morbidity and mortality, especially for small children. Successive surveys recorded impressive improvement in terms of access to appropriate services for sanitation and especially drinking water. Time series for related MDG indicators – the proportions of population using an impro-

¹⁰ The definition of slum- and inadequate housing includes components of durability of housing, overcrowding, access to drinking water and sanitation, and security of tenure.

ved drinking water source and an improved sanitation facility¹¹ – are available since 2007-08 and presented in *Figure 7*.^{12,13}

Figure 7: Percentage of population with access to improved drinking water and improved sanitation



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



To measure people's access to appropriate drinking-water and sanitation services, new indicators were developed within the SDG framework. These indicators extend the MDG indicators on water and sanitation by incorporating additional criteria for safe management of services, which could not yet be incorporated in the ALCS 2016-17. Consequently, only 'proxy indicators' can be released. The proxy indicator for drinking water suggests that 36 percent of the population use safely-managed drinking water (SDG indicator 6.1.1).^{14,15} and 41 percent use safely-managed sanitation services.¹⁶

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



The latest ALCS shows that the proportion of population with access to electricity is now almost universal (98 percent; SDG indicator 7.1.1). The very high level of access to electricity is particularly due to a rapid distribution of solar panels, from 2 percent in 2007-08, 22 percent in 2011-12, 48 percent in 2013-14

- 11 Improved drinking water sources are those that have the potential to deliver safe water by nature of their design and construction. These include piped supplies and non-piped supplies (such as boreholes, protected wells and springs, rainwater and packaged or delivered water, e.g. by tanker trucks). Improved sanitation facilities are defined as ones that hygienically separate human excreta from human contact. These facilities include wet sanitation technologies (flush and pour flush toilets connecting to sewers, septic tanks or pit latrines) and dry sanitation technologies (ventilated improved pit latrines, pit latrines with slabs and composting toilets).
- 12 Reasons for the apparent slight decline in the percentage of people with access to improved drinking water source need further investigation.
- 13 Sanitation information from surveys prior to 2013-14 is based on a different conceptualisation and is not comparable with more recent information.
- 14 Indicator 6.1.1 is based on criteria of improved drinking water source (MDG indicator 7.8, footnote 11), accessibility on the premises, availability when needed and in absence of contamination. The latter two criteria are not accommodated by the present ALCS.
- 15 In ten provinces, the ALCS tested a water-quality module in the questionnaire, which allowed the calculation of the SDG indicator for drinking water according to the full definition. Applying the full definition reduced the proxy indicator for the ten provinces from 68 percent (corresponding to the national figure of 36 percent) to 21 percent.
- 16 SDG indicator 6.2.1 is based on criteria of improved sanitation facilities (footnote 9), shared facilities and management of excreta. The latter criterion is not accommodated by the present ALCS.

to 59 percent now. Reliance on clean fuels for lighting, cooking and heating is achieved by 98, 25 and 4 percent of the population, respectively (SDG indicator 7.1.2).

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Physical living conditions also refer to access to markets, health facilities and other services that may not be available in the community. A reliable physical infrastructure, including all-weather roads, is a condition for people's well-being and economic development. One of the related SDG indicators is the proportion of the rural population who live within two kilometres of an all-season road (SDG indicator 9.1.1). In the ALCS 2016-17, it was found that 63 percent of the rural population (including Kuchi) had access to such roads within two kilometres.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

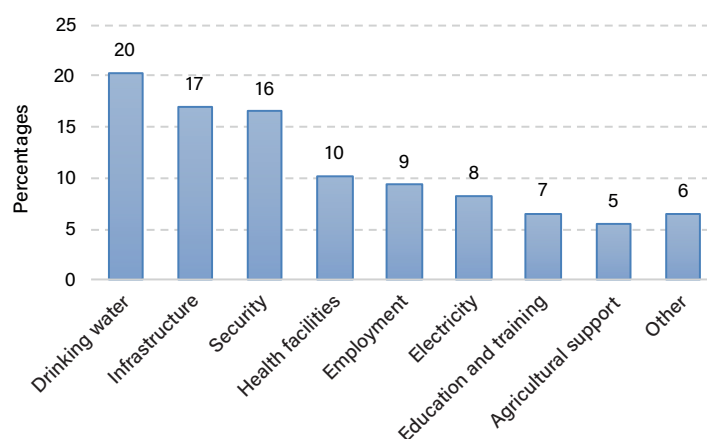


The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that new information and communication technologies are instrumental in advancing the SDGs. The ALCS collects information for two SDG indicators: the proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone (SDG indicator 5.b.1) and the proportion of individuals using the internet (SDG indicator 17.8.1). Survey results indicate that 43 percent of the total Afghan population aged 15 years and over use mobile phones, but only 4 percent of the population aged 15 and over used internet in the 12 months before the survey.

Shocks and development priorities

The ALCS not only collects information about people's living conditions, but also qualitative information about shocks experienced by households (e.g. natural disasters, water shortages, negative price changes, loss of jobs, deaths of household members) and the strategies applied to cope with these shocks. In addition, male and female household representatives, as well as male Shura's were asked about the most urgent needs that the government should address in their community. Consistent with previous surveys, drinking water – and particularly sufficient supply – ranks as the highest concern that needs to be addressed, closely followed by infrastructural improvements (roads and bridges) and security (*Figure 8*). Male and female respondents had quite similar views on development priorities, but answers strongly differed across types of residence. Drinking water is more often mentioned as development priority in rural areas than in urban areas, and particularly more among the nomadic Kuchi. On the other hand, infrastructure and employment are particularly urban concerns.

Figure 8: Household priority for community development (in percentages)



Gender equality

Gender equality and women's empowerment were made a key dimension in Afghanistan's development framework, as well as internationally in the 2030 SDG Agenda. SDG 5 is specifically devoted to this development topic, but it was stressed that every relevant SDG indicator should be differentiated by sex to measure progress toward the elimination of gender inequalities. The ALCS Analysis report provides detailed information in this respect, of which a selection is presented here.



The one gender-equity SDG indicator that is covered by the ALCS is the proportion of women in managerial positions (SDG indicator 5.5.2). In 2016-17, this proportion was measured at 4 percent, indicating very low women's power in decision making in the economy. *Table 1* presents selected gender parity indices in the sectors of education and the labour market.¹⁷ Comparison of the adult and youth literacy rates indicate that recently progress is made in gender equity in literacy, even though the literacy rate of young women is still only 57 percent of that of young men. The indices for gross attendance ratios also show stark gender disparities, which increase with level of education. The share of women participating in the economy is only one third of that of men, and the indices for unemployment and the proportion of youth outside education, employment or training (NEET) show a very disadvantaged position of women on the labour market.

Table 1: Selected gender parity indices

Development indicator	Gender parity index
Adult literacy rate	0.40
Youth literacy rate	0.57
Gross primary attendance ratio	0.71
Gross secondary attendance ratio	0.51
Gross tertiary attendance ratio	0.39
Labour force participation rate	0.33
Unemployment rate	1.55
Youth unemployment rate	1.49
Share of youth not in education, employment or training	1.76

¹⁷ The gender parity index is calculated as the ratio between the values of a specific indicator for girls/women and boys/men. An index value ranges between 0 and 2. A value of 1 indicates exact gender equity and the further from 1 the parity index lies, the greater the gender disparity.

Conclusions

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17 is the latest in a series that provides key information for assessing the social and economic situation of Afghanistan's population. The survey's results provide key input for the programmes and policies of the Government of Afghanistan, NGO's and the donor community, and enable the monitoring of their effect on the living conditions of the Afghan people. In an international perspective, Afghanistan has committed to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ALCS is the first national survey that produces indicators to monitor progress on the SDGs for the country.

The present 2016-17 survey confirms improvement on a number of development indicators, such as those related to sanitation services, access to electricity and maternal health care. On the other hand, various indicators that previously showed positive trends have now plateaued at the same levels observed in earlier surveys. The most concerning among these are the indicators on education, drinking-water and gender-equality. Moreover, the ALCS analysis reveals a continuous process of farmland fragmentation, a worrying situation in Afghanistan's labour market and large increases in food insecurity and poverty, compared to previous ALCS assessments.

The picture of stagnation and deterioration should be seen against the recent worsening of the security situation in the country, the large influx of returnees, the reduction of international presence in and aid to Afghanistan and macro-economic conditions. In addition, more structural factors continue to play a role in impeding development in the country, including the very low participation of women in the economy and in society in general, the low levels of education and skills in the country's work force and the poor performance of the labour market. In the context of Afghanistan, it would be a mistake to understand labour-market challenges mainly in terms of unemployment. Equally – if not more – important is the low quality of employment, characterised by vulnerable, low-productivity and low-paid jobs that prevent households from escaping poverty and improving their living conditions.

Moreover, the very high fertility and population growth rates generate unsustainable conditions for development in the country. Analysis of the ALCS shows that these factors offset much of government and donor development efforts, and undermine the capacity of many households and individuals – in particular women and girls – to escape poverty and poor health.