

# International Literacy Day 2021

## Literacy for a human-centred recovery: Narrowing the digital divide

### Fact sheet on literacy in Afghanistan

#### Country profile

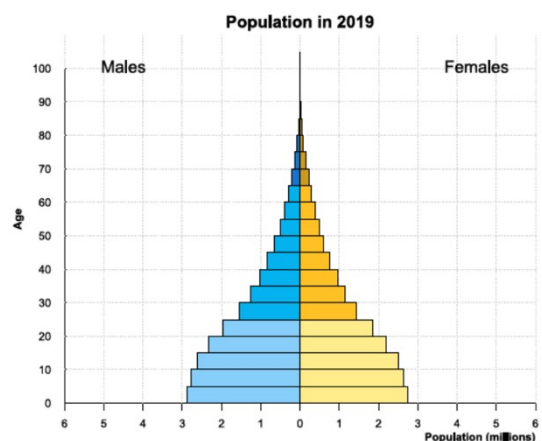
##### Demography<sup>i</sup>

**Total Population:** 39.6 million (aged 24 and younger: 64 per cent)

**Annual rate of population change:** 2.3%

**Life expectancy at birth:** 64.8 years

**Rural population:** 74% of the total population



##### Economy and development<sup>ii</sup>

**Gross national income (GNI) per capita:** 2,229 (constant 2017 PPP\$)

**Population in multidimensional poverty, head count:** 55.9%

**Employment to population ratio:** 43.5% (aged 15 and older)

**Skilled labour force:** 19.2% of labour force

**Internet users as % of total population:** 13.5%

**Access to Internet in urban areas (% of the population):** 31%

**Access to Internet in rural areas (% of the population):** 9%

## Education<sup>iii</sup>

Gross enrolment ratio in primary education: 104% (2018)

Gross enrolment ratio in secondary education: 55.4% (2018)

Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education: 9.7% (2018)

Out of school children: 3.7 million (60% girls) (2018)

### Progress in enrolments: 2001-2018

1 million students → 10 million students

Primary school	773,000	→	6.5 million
Lower secondary	202,000	→	2 million
Upper secondary	160,000	→	1 million
Higher education	26,000	→	0.4 million
*of whom 7.6% study abroad			

## Education expenditures<sup>iv</sup>

Government expenditure on education as % of GDP: 3.9% (2019)

Government expenditure as % of total government expenditure: 11.5% (2020)

Government expenditure on Adult Learning and Education as % of expenditure on education: 2.6% (2018)

Aid to education: at 49% of all education expenditures (2020).

## Youth and adult literacy<sup>v</sup>

### Adult Literacy rate (aged 15 and older):

Total: 43% (2018)  
 Male: 55.5%  
 Female: 29.8%  
 Elderly (65 years old and above): 13,3%

### Youth Literacy rate (aged 15-24):

Total: 65.4% (2018)  
 Male: 74.1%  
 Female: 56.3%

### Elderly literacy rate (aged 65 and older):

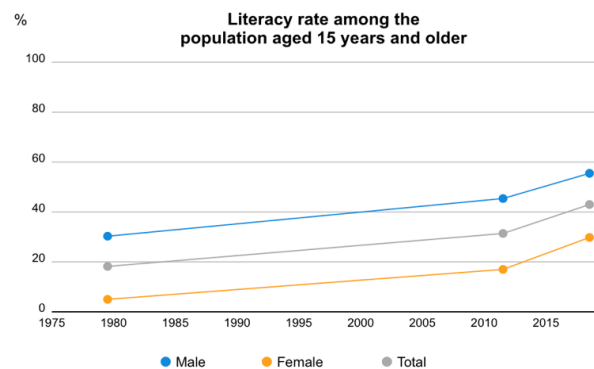
Total: 13,3% (2018)  
 Male: 24.8%  
 Female: 3.5

Number of illiterate adults (aged 15 and older): Total: 12,053,875 (2018)

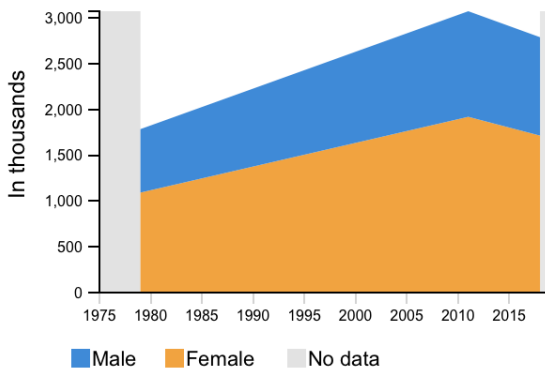
Male: 40.2%  
 Female: 59.8%

Number of illiterate youth (aged 15-24): Total: 2,791,022 (2018)

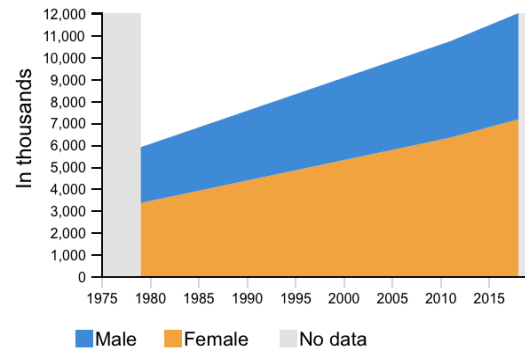
Male: 39%%  
 Female: 61



Illiterate population aged 15-24 years



Illiterate population aged 15 years and older



## UNESCO's activities in Afghanistan for literacy

### *Sector-wide support since 2002*

UNESCO supported the Afghan government in the development of a **nation-wide education revamp**, encompassing all National Strategies for Education, the first-ever National Institute for Educational Planning, a global Education sector analysis, a General Education Curriculum reform (reaching over 1 million learners), and a strategic plan for higher education.

### *Youth and adult literacy since 2006*

With the support of partners including Sweden, Japan, Norway, Denmark, UN agencies and civil society organizations throughout the country, UNESCO led **the largest literacy programme in Afghan history**, reaching **1.242.000 learners**, including **800.000 women and girls**. **45.000 police officers** have also been reached and trained through the following.

### **Period of 2006-2015 with the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) Initiative<sup>vi</sup>**

UNESCO supported Afghanistan within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), launched by UNESCO in 2006 as a key operational mechanism for the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012), targeting 35 countries facing greater literacy challenges, including Afghanistan. In 2007, the Afghan Ministry of Education decided to adopt LIFE as the national literacy framework to achieve the goals of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP, 2006-2010). UNESCO supported national efforts in conducting national needs assessment, development of the National Literacy Action Plans (NLAP, 2010-2014, 2009-2015, 2012-2015) and the National Literacy Strategy: Policies, Targets and Strategies<sup>vii</sup>, and establishing the LIFE Coordination Working Group in

2007. The LIFE Coordination Working Group was designated as a sub-group of the Education Development Board, which facilitated mainstreaming literacy into the broader national education and development agendas and frameworks, including an Afghan National Qualifications Framework. Three main projects implemented were as follows.

- A national, multi-donor funded programme, '**Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA) programme** (2008-2019)<sup>viii</sup> improved literacy, numeracy and vocational skills for an estimated **1.2 million beneficiaries**, two-thirds of whom are women, in all 34 provinces. A major outcome of ELA was the revision of curriculum for youth and adult's literacy and the development the **Curriculum Framework for Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education (YALBE)** in 2014 as a guiding framework for developing a YALBE curriculum (subject syllabi, textbooks, teacher guides and assessment tools) in three different levels equivalent to grades 1-9 of general education. In addition, the ELA focused on data collection and analysis and enhancing formal and non-formal Education management system, capacity development and advocacy at national and provincial levels. Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) was pilot tested in Afghanistan as part of ELA programme<sup>ix</sup>.
- The **Support for Adult Literacy in Afghanistan (SALA) project** (2017- 2019) complemented ELA.
- The **Literacy Empowerment for Afghan Police (LEAP)** (2011-2016) provided the literacy training to Afghan national police to improve quality of policing in Afghanistan. In the Phase 1 (2011-2013), literacy training materials were developed, and provided training for **a network of 500 volunteer police literary facilitators and a team with the Minister of Interior Affairs Literacy Unit**. In the Phase 2 (2013-2016), **500 literacy classes** were delivered for **10,000 police officers** in Kabul and 18 other provinces.

## Period of 2016-present

Within the framework of the '**Better Education Systems for Afghanistan's Future**' (BESAF) project (2018-2021) and the [Global Alliance for literacy within the Lifelong Learning Framework](#) (GAL) (2016-2025), UNESCO has provided support to Afghanistan for youth and adult literacy mainly through the following.

- The large-scale **BESAF** project aims improve Afghanistan's education system through providing support to develop, implement and monitor a robust education sector plan, revise curricula and learning resources for formal basic education, non-formal adult education, and higher education; and to increase access to general literacy and skill-based literacy programs. For youth and adult literacy, the BESAF contributed to:
  - **Capacity development of 71 MoE officials on non-formal education planning** and training of **135 master trainers and 564 literacy facilitators** on the provision of basic general literacy to youth and adults.
  - the development of the **Youth and Adults Literacy and Basic Education (YALBE) curriculum for level 1 and 2 (equivalent to grades 1-3 and 4-6 of general education)**, which consists of the finalization of the **YALBE Curriculum Framework** for all levels, the subject syllabi of the YALBE Curriculum level 1 in 2017, the finalization of a facilitator's manual for level 1, and the development of the subject syllabi for level 2 and the instructional materials since 2019 (ongoing).
  - the provision of 9-month **Basic General Literacy (BGL) courses**, for which, within the BESAF project, **135 master trainers were trained and 564 literacy facilitators**. In January 2021, the Ministry of Education initiated the first phase of the BGL courses within the BESAF project in 12

provinces, covering 50 districts, to provide literacy services to 7,050 learners, 60% of whom are women above age 15.

- the improvement of the **Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS)** and the data collection, administration and verification of the NFE-MIS by developing an updated registration form for literacy courses, along with a user manual. Following the endorsement of the registration form, UNESCO contributed to enhancing the capacity of the MoE in data entry, analysis and further administration, through the training of 71 (19 female) literacy master trainers.
- **social mobilization and community participation efforts of the Ministry of Education for the increased demand for youth and adult literacy learning.** Both the national mobilization strategy and community participation manual were reviewed by a technical working group established and chaired by UNESCO. In 2021, UNESCO will conduct a community outreach survey to better understand perceptions of community members on the key challenges and bottlenecks regarding youth and adult education.
- the development of a **communication and advocacy action plan**, including clear communication guidelines for the development of communication materials and an operational plan for the communication and advocacy package which will be used during the `Literacy for a better future` Campaign to be launched in 2021.
- The **Accelerated Non-Normal Education Programme (ANEP) project** (2019- 2022) aims to support the national efforts to ensure increased equitable and inclusive access to youth and adult literacy courses of good quality, improved quality and relevance of curriculum, professionalization of the literacy educators and improved supportive policy environment for non-formal education, through predominantly community outreach approaches.

**The National Alliance for Literacy (NAL):** Both UNESCO and the Literacy Directorate of the Ministry of Education chair the bi-monthly meeting of the NAL, which is a platform for all literacy stakeholders in the country to take stock of achievements made and identify challenges and ways forward.

### COVID-19 responses

UNESCO has been supporting the MoE with evidence-based policymaking and planning for school reopening, and resilience building for Covid-19 and beyond, in line with the national Covid-19 response plan for education. Specific emphasis has been given in advocacy for girls' right to education and back-to-school and working with civil society to raise community awareness of the right to education and the importance of girls' education. UNESCO received endorsement of the MoE and development partners in Afghanistan to take the co-lead role of the Local Education Group (LEG) in Afghanistan in 2021.

UNESCO also contributed to the promotion of literacy in Afghanistan through different regional, global and national platforms.

- The **Global Alliance for literacy within the Lifelong Learning Framework (GAL):** Afghanistan is one of the 29 member countries targeted by the GAL.

- The [Global Alliance to Monitor Learning \(GMAL\)](#): Afghanistan is a member of the GAML Taskforce 4.6, which is responsible for providing advice on measures for monitoring progress towards SDG Target 4.6, in particular SDG Indicator 4.6.1.
- The [UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities \(GNLC\)](#): Bamiyan is a member of the network.
- The [UNESCO International Literacy Prizes \(ILP\)](#): In 2018, 'Accelerated Education for Marginalized Women and Girls' programme' managed by Aid for Afghanistan, a non-profit organisation, was awarded **King Sejong Prize, for its contribution to providing a second chance for learning to 3,000 girls and women in six provinces**. In 2009, a community-owned initiative, the Pashai Language Development Project managed by the charity SERVE was awarded the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy for its outstanding efforts to provide literacy courses, as well as livelihood, public health and nutrition education to around 1,000 Pashai adults every year\*.
- The [International Conferences on Adult Education \(CONFITEA\)](#): Afghanistan participated in the CONFITEA VI (Mexico, 2009). The CONFITEA VII will take place in Morocco in 2022, for which the preparation is underway.
- The [Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 \(APMED\)](#): a convening platform for education officials and development partners throughout the region to learn about the latest global and regional developments on SDG 4 and to advance the ambitious Education 2030 Agenda.
- [International Literacy Day \(ILD\)](#) celebrations: Afghanistan participated in the global ILD celebrations.



## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> **Data sources:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division <https://population.un.org/wpp/>, NISA Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020) [Human Development Report indicators for Afghanistan](#), New York: UNDP.

<sup>ii</sup> **Data sources:** UNDP (2020) *ibid*, and Minister of Education, Afghanistan (2020). [Alternate Education Service Delivery COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan](#). Kabul: Afghanistan.

<sup>iii</sup> **Data source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [Afghanistan](#). Montreal:UIS., and Minister of Education, Afghanistan and UNICEF (2018) [Global Initiative on Out-of-school Children: Afghanistan Country Study](#). Kabul.

<sup>iv</sup> **Data source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [Afghanistan](#). Montreal:UIS, UNESCO Bangkok and UNESCO New Delhi (2020) Report of the CONFINTEA VII- Sub-regional consultation (South Asia), New Delhi, India, 30 March 2020: Specific Issues, Innovations, Impact of COVID-19, Key Priorities, Outlining Future Prospects of ALE., Hamburg:UIL. and Ministry of Education (2020) 2020 Education Sector Analysis (ESA) of Afghanistan.Kabul: MOE.

<sup>v</sup> **Data source:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [Afghanistan](#). Montreal:UIS.

<sup>vi</sup> [LIFE](#) was a key operational mechanism for the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012), which was led and coordinated by UNESCO. It also intended to contribute towards achieving the Six Education for All goals, the Millennium Development Goals and the Belém Framework for Action adopted at the UNESCO's Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI). LIFE aimed to support countries in achieving a fifty per cent improvement in their adult literacy rates by 2015. Please also see: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2012) [Global LIFE Mid-term Evaluation Report 2006-2011: Looking Forward with LIFE – Literacy Initiative for Empowerment](#). Hamburg: UIL. for achieving the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD – 2003–2012).

<sup>vii</sup> Minister of Education, Afghanistan (2013) [National Literacy Strategy: Policies, Targets and Strategies](#). Kabul: MOE.

<sup>viii</sup> <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/enhancement-literacy-afghanistan-afghanistan>

<sup>ix</sup> UIS (2017). [Implementation in Diverse Settings of the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme \(LAMP\): Lessons for Sustainable Development Goal 4 \(SDG4\)](#). Montreal: UIS

<sup>x</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/education-project-afghanistan-helping-war-affected-women-and-girls-receives-unesco-literacy> (2018 laureate) and <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183809> (2009 laureate)