

Afghanistan crisis update

Women and girls in displacement

Factsheet II - September 2022

The fall of Afghanistan to Taliban rule in August 2021 continues to contribute to the deterioration of the rights and freedoms of women and girls. The Taliban have introduced restrictive measures that systematically exclude women and girls from social, economic and political life. In May 2022, the Taliban issued a directive indicating that women and girls must fully cover themselves in public, including their faces, and leave home only in cases of necessity,¹ adding to existing restrictions on women’s work, freedom of movement and access to services. On 17 September 2021, the Taliban announced that girls should refrain from attending secondary school, a fact that was reiterated on 23 March 2022 by announcing secondary schools would remain closed for girls.² Furthermore, rights violations continue to be reported, including forced marriages and beatings, and the detention of protesters, women’s rights activists and female security forces.³ All of this, along with conflict and climate change driven disasters, may be contributing to the displacement of women and girls, both within and outside the country.

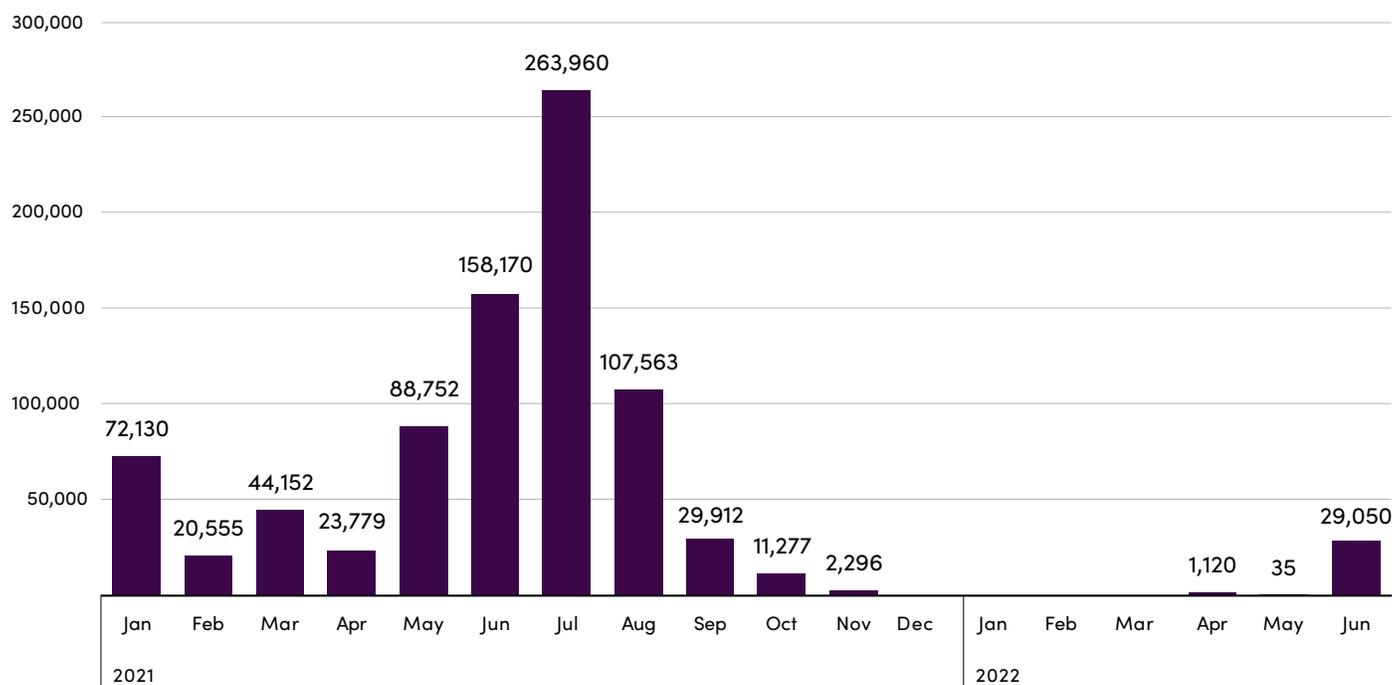
This factsheet is the second in a series that examines the changing situation in Afghanistan. It was produced by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), using data from UNHCR, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other sources as indicated. Given the rapidly shifting situation in the country, estimates are likely to change over time. Trends or events taking place after June 2022 will be reflected in future factsheets of this series.

After a brief lull, displacements are back on the rise

The total number of Afghan people in displacement increased substantially in 2021. Conflict slightly waned after August 2021, and the last quarter of the year saw lower numbers of internally displaced people. New internal displacements, however, were recorded in April, May and June 2022 (figure 1), largely due to security threats.⁴ While some displaced families were able to move as a group, many families separated and are in need of reunification. Sex-disaggregated data on these displacements is only available for those who moved from Panjshir to Dara / Ab Shar as of 26 April 2022, and among them roughly 19 per cent were adult women, 19 per cent were adult men, and an estimated 53 per cent were children.⁵

FIGURE 1:

Number of conflict-induced newly internally displaced people in Afghanistan, (total)



Source: OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange (accessed on 28 August 2022).

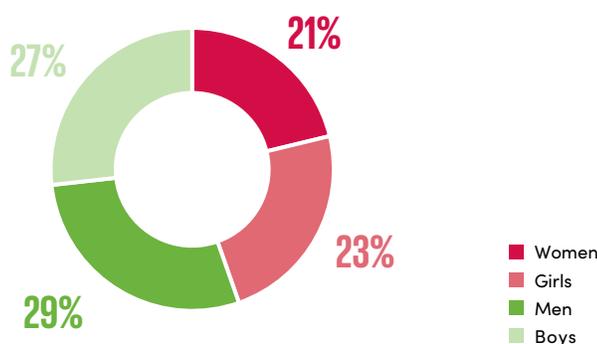
Women were less likely to flee the country but when they did, they took their families with them

The data on people displaced to neighbouring countries in 2022 indicates that men and boys were more likely than women to leave Afghanistan for the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (figure 2).

Although most of the new arrivals in these two countries (69 per cent) were registered as nuclear groups (figure 3), an estimated 10,668 women fled without a male partner to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in the first half of 2022 alone (figure 4). Importantly, data show that women rarely fled Afghanistan without children or other dependents (less than 1,000 women fled alone in 2022, compared to 10,464 men). When fleeing the country with children or older dependents, women are more likely to care for more people than men (women brought an average of 4.2 children or adult dependents with them, compared to 3.2 dependents brought by men).

FIGURE 2:

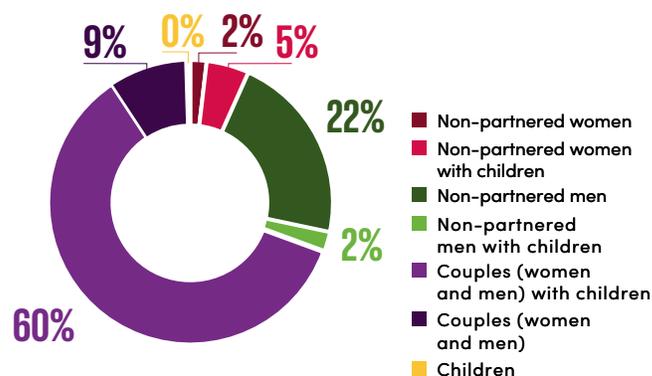
Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers newly arrived to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (active, hold, closed and inactive cases), by sex, (percentage)



Source: Estimates based on UNHCR data as of 13 June 2022

FIGURE 3:

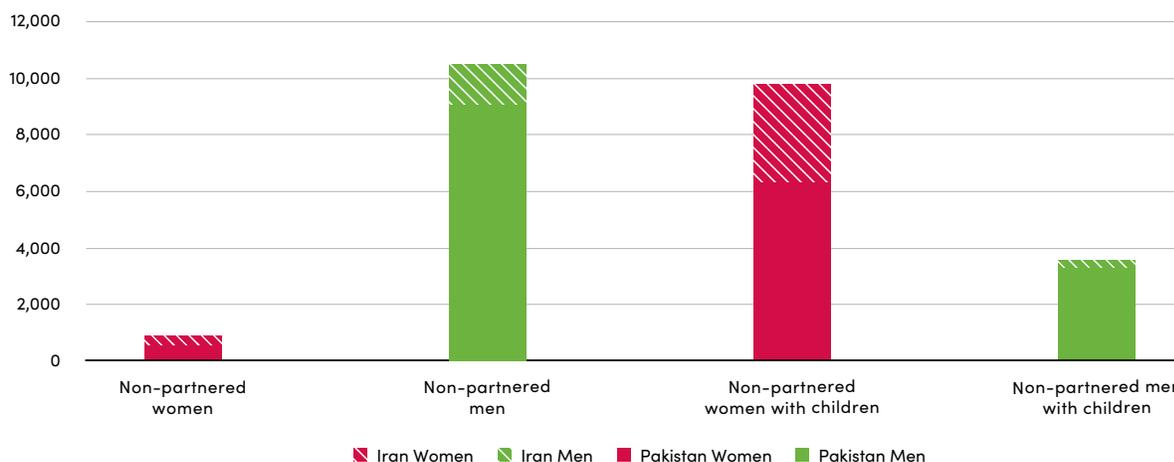
Family composition of newly recorded groups of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (active, hold, closed and inactive cases), (percentage)



Source: Estimates based on UNHCR data as of 13 June 2022. For statistical purposes, "non-partnered" refers adults arriving without an adult of the opposite sex.

FIGURE 4:

Number of newly recorded Afghans in need of international protection in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (active, hold, closed and inactive cases), non-partnered women and men, (total)



Source: Estimates based on UNHCR data as of 13 June 2022.

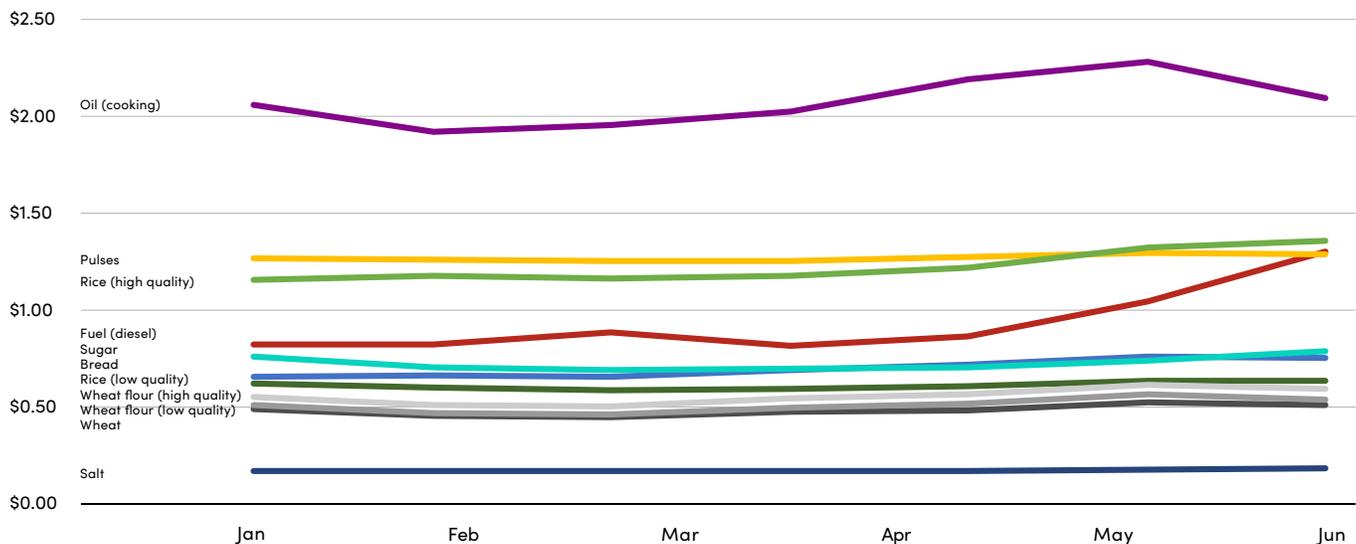
Note: Couples (women and men) and groups with a child registered as the group's head were excluded from the graph. For statistical purposes, "non-partnered" refers adults arriving without an adult of the opposite sex.

The current cost-of-living crisis will hit displaced women harder

The global cost-of-living crisis is producing significant increases in the prices of basic goods, such as food and fuel.⁶ This, coupled with Afghanistan's current economic contraction, asset freeze and banking crisis⁷, has direct repercussions for the purchasing power of women and men, especially for single adults living with dependents. Data show that the prices of key goods in Afghanistan, such as diesel fuel, quality rice and bread, have increased substantially since the beginning of 2022 (absolute changes), while the price of cooking oil remains among the highest per kilogram (figure 5). In key destination countries for Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers, such as Pakistan, the absolute price increases have been even higher, with cooking oil, ghee, poultry and diesel fuel seeing the largest absolute price increases (figure 6). Given that an estimated 72 per cent of non-partnered⁸ Afghan women refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries live in single adult households with dependents, compared to 9.5 per cent of men, women are more likely to struggle to provide sufficient food and basic goods for their families (see infographic 1).

FIGURE 5:

Average price in Afghanistan per kilogram or litre of food and other basic goods, (United States dollars)

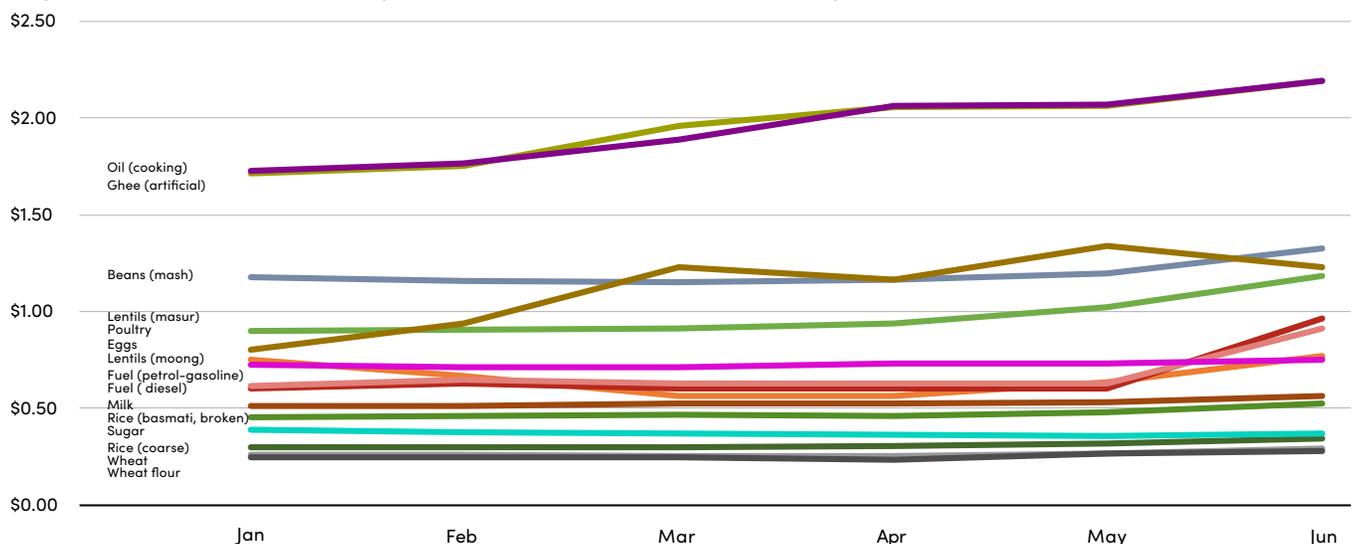


Source: Estimates from the World Food Programme refer to January-June 2022, extracted from OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange, accessed on 3 August 2022.

Note: Unweighted averages of the province-level price data.

FIGURE 6:

Average price in Pakistan per kilogram or litre of food and other basic goods, (United States dollars)



Source: Estimates from the World Food Programme refer to January-June 2022, extracted from OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange, accessed on 3 August 2022.

Note: Unweighted averages of the province-level price data.

INFOGRAPHIC 1:

The effects of the cost-of-living crisis for Afghan women in displacement



72% vs **10%**
women men

Refugees and asylum-seekers*
in single adult households live
with dependents.



As the sole breadwinner in many cases, refugee women* are likely to
struggle more than men to provide food and fuel for their families



saw the largest absolute price increases.

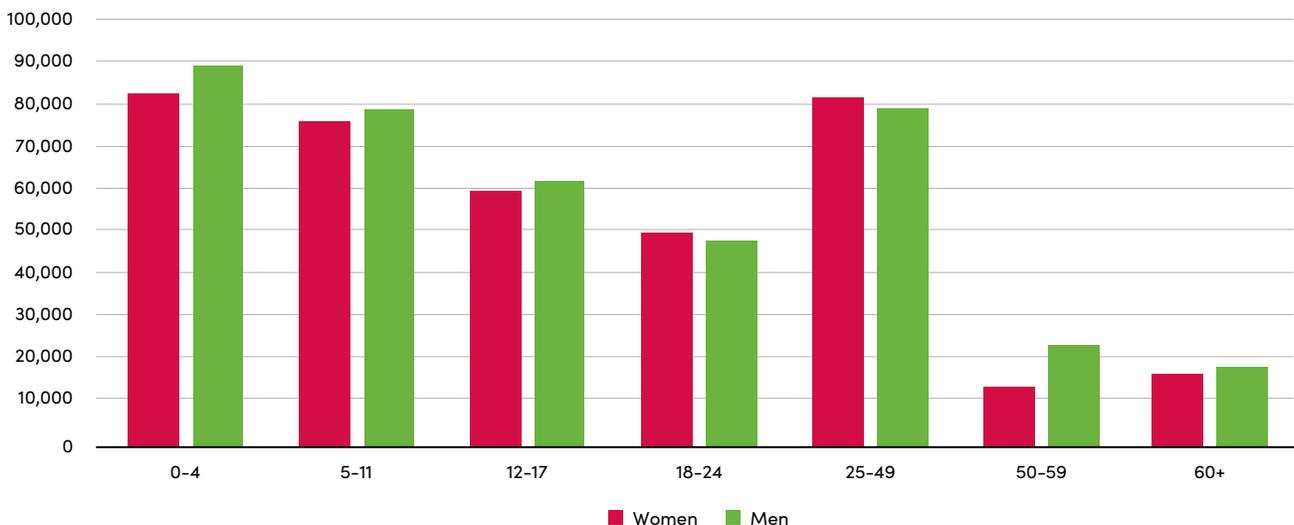
*Refers to Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers newly arrived in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2022.
Source: Estimates based on UNHCR data as of 13 June 2022.

Many internally displaced women and their families are returning home

Approximately 800,000 internally displaced persons had returned home as of December 2021. Across most age groups, more men than women returned, which is no surprise given that more men fled in the first place (figure 7). However, among people of reproductive age (18 to 49), more women than men returned. Given that, as noted earlier, women are far more likely than men to flee with children, and women bring more dependents than men on average, the economic burden of living in displacement and providing food and shelter for their families may be a reason for disproportionate returns among women age 18 to 49.

FIGURE 7:

Number of Afghan returnees (annual stock), by sex and age, (total)

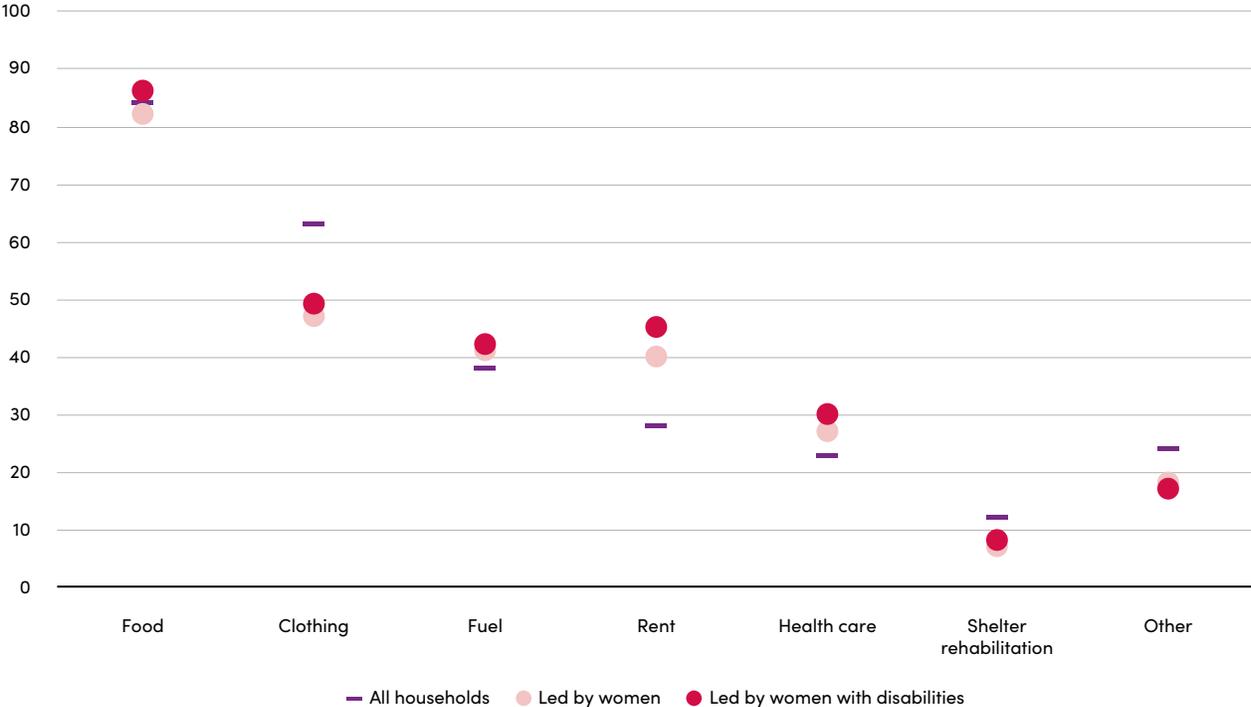


Source: Estimates for December 2021 based on UNHCR data as of 13 June 2022.

Displaced and returnee women face challenges to access services, despite humanitarian assistance efforts

Afghan returnees continue to encounter barriers to access basic goods and key services. Surveys of returnees conducted between October 2021 and April 2022 indicate that access to food, clothing and fuel remain among the top priority needs. Data disaggregated by household composition are not available to compare whether women and men in the same types of households face the same challenges. However, aggregated data indicate that households with a woman registered as the household lead (typically households where women are the only adult, with or without dependent children) were less likely than the average household to cite clothing as a key priority for the household, but they were more likely to cite health care, rent and fuel as top priority needs (figure 8). A key concern for women listed as household leads was the affordability of rent (an estimated 40 per cent noted that they may be unable to afford rent or may be at risk of eviction, compared to 28 per cent on average. For households led by a woman with disabilities, this figure rose to 45 per cent). Recent restrictions limiting Afghan women’s access to economic opportunities (women’s labour force participation decreased by 16 per cent between August and October 2021, compared with 6 per cent in the case of men)⁹ may be contributing to these differences.

FIGURE 8:
Proportion of internally displaced returnees* that noted an item was a priority need for the household, by sex of the person registered as household lead, (percentage)



Source: UNHCR data collected between October 2021 and April 2022.
 * May include responses of internally displaced people, although the bulk of respondents are internally displaced returnees.

Girls remain barred from accessing education in Afghanistan, and this will have lifelong consequences

Afghanistan is now the only country in the world expressly prohibiting girls from attending secondary education. On 23 March 2022, an official announcement was made to indefinitely postpone the planned reopening of schooling for girls above grade 6.¹⁰ This is expected to worsen the already low female literacy rate in the country, which currently stands at 23 per cent.¹¹ At present, it is estimated that more than 2 million girls age 10–14 are affected by secondary school closures, as are 1.8 million girls age 15–19.¹² This will have lifelong consequences, as evidence shows that higher education is associated with older age at first marriage, better paid jobs, higher likelihood to own assets, more decision-making power and lower exposure to intimate partner violence (see infographic 2).

Girls encounter significant barriers to access schooling in countries neighbouring Afghanistan. Refugee girls face further barriers arising from social norms and poverty, among other factors. In 2019, the gross enrolment rate for refugee girls in primary school in Pakistan was 70 per cent, compared with 92 per cent for refugee boys¹³. In comparison, the national rate in Pakistan stood at 89 per cent for girls and 101 per cent for boys in the same year.¹⁴

INFOGRAPHIC 2:

Differences in outcomes for women in Afghanistan, by level of education, 2015

Proportion of women in Afghanistan that...	No education	Primary	Secondary	Higher
 Deliver at a health facility	43%	70%	76%	92%
 Own a house alone or jointly	3%	4%	5%	5%
 Decide about their own health care	45%	56%	63%	65%
 Are victims of physical/sexual violence at the hands of their partner	54%	42%	33%	27%

Source: Demographic and Health Survey, 2015. Data extracted from [DHS Stat Compiler](#), accessed on 4 August 2022.
 Note: 2015 is the latest available year. The survey was conducted again in 2020–21 but the data have not been released.

Endnotes

- 1 H. Barr and S. Fetrat, 2022, 'Afghans Call to #FreeHerFace: Campaign Opposes Taliban Forcing On-Air Female Journalists to Cover Faces', Human Rights Watch, 23 May. Available at www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/23/afghans-call-freeherface.
- 2 UN Women, 2022, 'Women's rights in Afghanistan one year after the Taliban take-over'. Available at www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Gender-alert-2-Womens-rights-in-Afghanistan-one-year-after-the-Taliban-take-over-en_0.pdf
- 3 Global Protection Cluster: Protection Analysis Update – Quarter 3. Available at www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/AFG_Protection-Analysis-Update_Q3_Final.pdf.
- 4 On 23 June, the 'Emirate Islami Military' attacked non-state group 'Military of Mawlawi Mahdi' in Balkhab district (Sar-e-pol). UNHCR, 2022. 'Emergency Joint Assessment Team Report on Yakawalang I & II IDPs Balkhab'
- 5 Sex-disaggregated data for children was not reported.
- 6 World Economic Forum, 2022. Available at: www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/cost-of-living-crisis-global-impact/
- 7 UNDP, 2021. Afghanistan: Socio-Economic Outlook 2021-2022. Available from www.undp.org/afghanistan/publications/afghanistan-socio-economic-outlook-2021-2022?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQjwuaiXBhCCARIsAKZLt3nyxVCDTwcr2p2VymPh6pxuoNp_2gDnKEH77hn9l16xcec1fv5UU8aApU7EALw_wcB
- 8 Refers to women that fled without a male partner.
- 9 Source: ILO. 2022. [Employment Prospects in Afghanistan: A Rapid Impact Assessment](#).
- 10 OHCHR, 2022, 'Afghanistan: UN experts condemn Taliban decision to deny girls secondary education' 24 March. Available at www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/afghanistan-un-experts-condemn-taliban-decision-deny-girls-secondary.
- 11 See World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=AF> (accessed on 2 September 2021).
- 12 National Statistics and Information Authority of Afghanistan.
- 13 UNHCR internal statistics.
- 14 See World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRR.MA?locations=PK>.

