



Working with the Newly-Arrived Afghans: Cultural Competency for Healthcare Providers

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December 7, 2021



Afghan Medical Professionals
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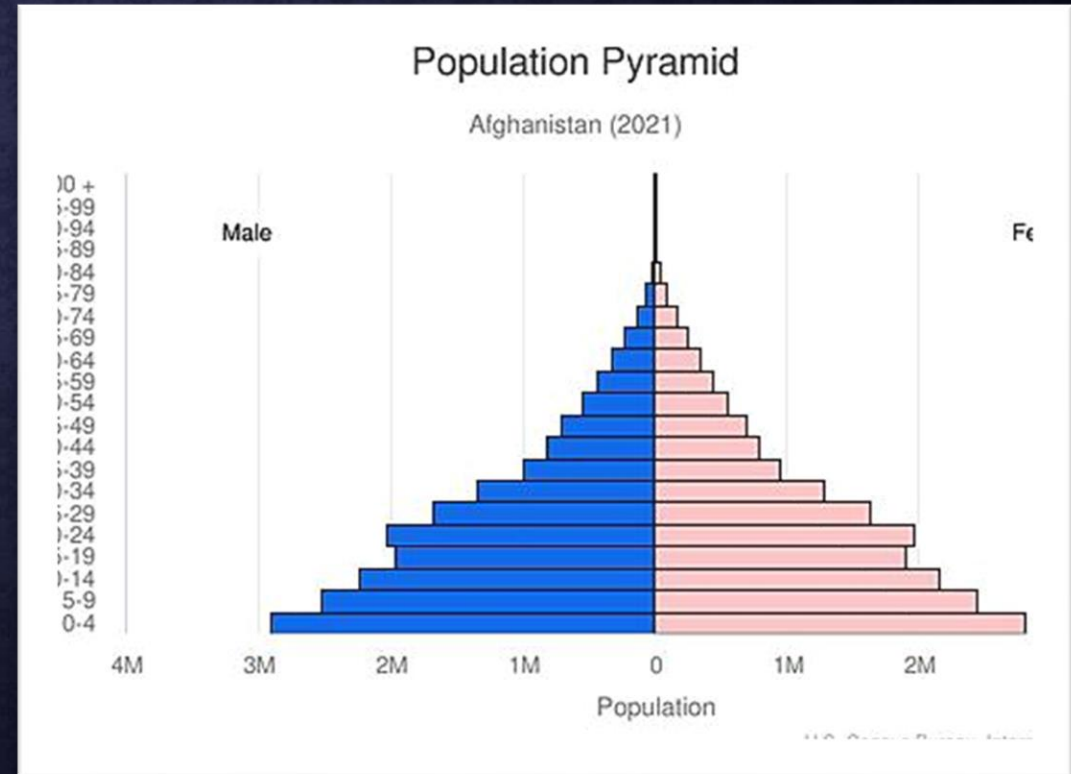
AFGHANISTAN: COUNTRY PROFILE

- Area Total: 652,230 sq km Land: 652,230 sq km
Water: 0 sq km Climate arid to semiarid; cold winters and hot summers
- Population 36.6 million (July 2020 est.)
- Population Growth 2.38% (2020 est.)
- Ethnicity Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, other (includes smaller numbers of Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Pashai, and Kyrghyz) (2015)



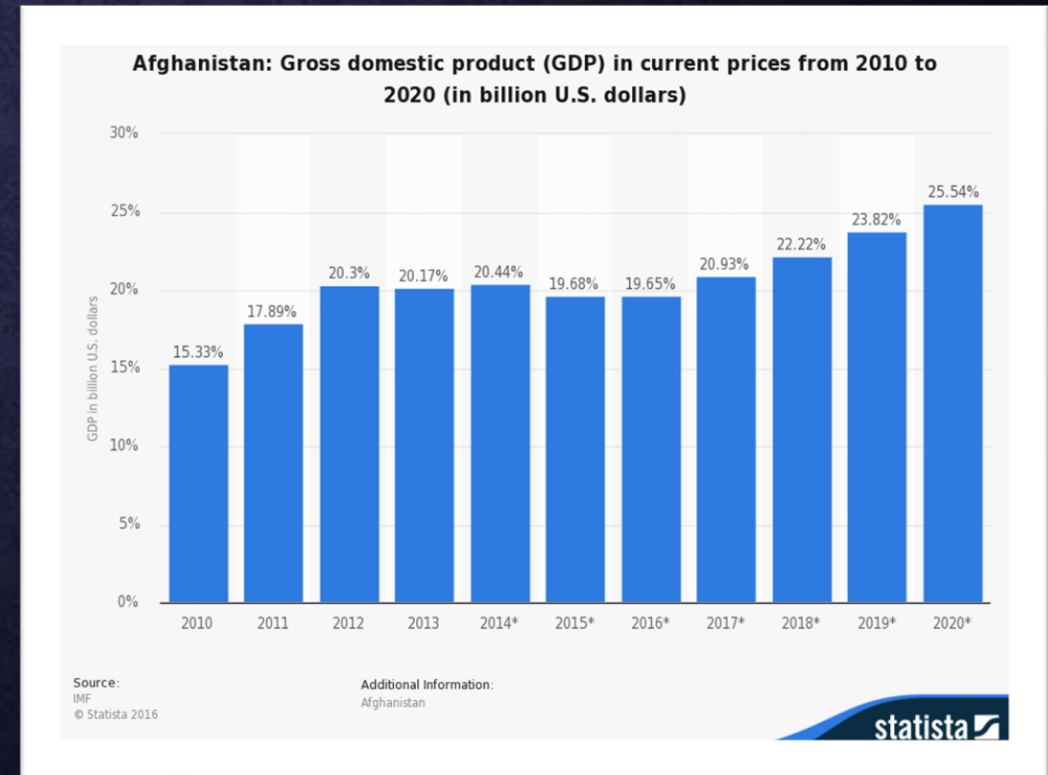
DEMOGRAPHICS

- Languages: Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 77% (Dari functions as the lingua franca), Pashto (official) 48%, Uzbek 11%, English 6%, Turkmen 3%, Urdu 3%, Pashayi 1%, Nuristani 1%, Arabic 1% , Balochi 1% (2017 est.)¹
- Religion: Muslim 99.7% (Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 – 15%), other 0.3% (2009 est.)
- Urbanization: urban population: 26% of total population (2020); rate of urbanization: 3.37% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)
- Literacy: 43% (2018)



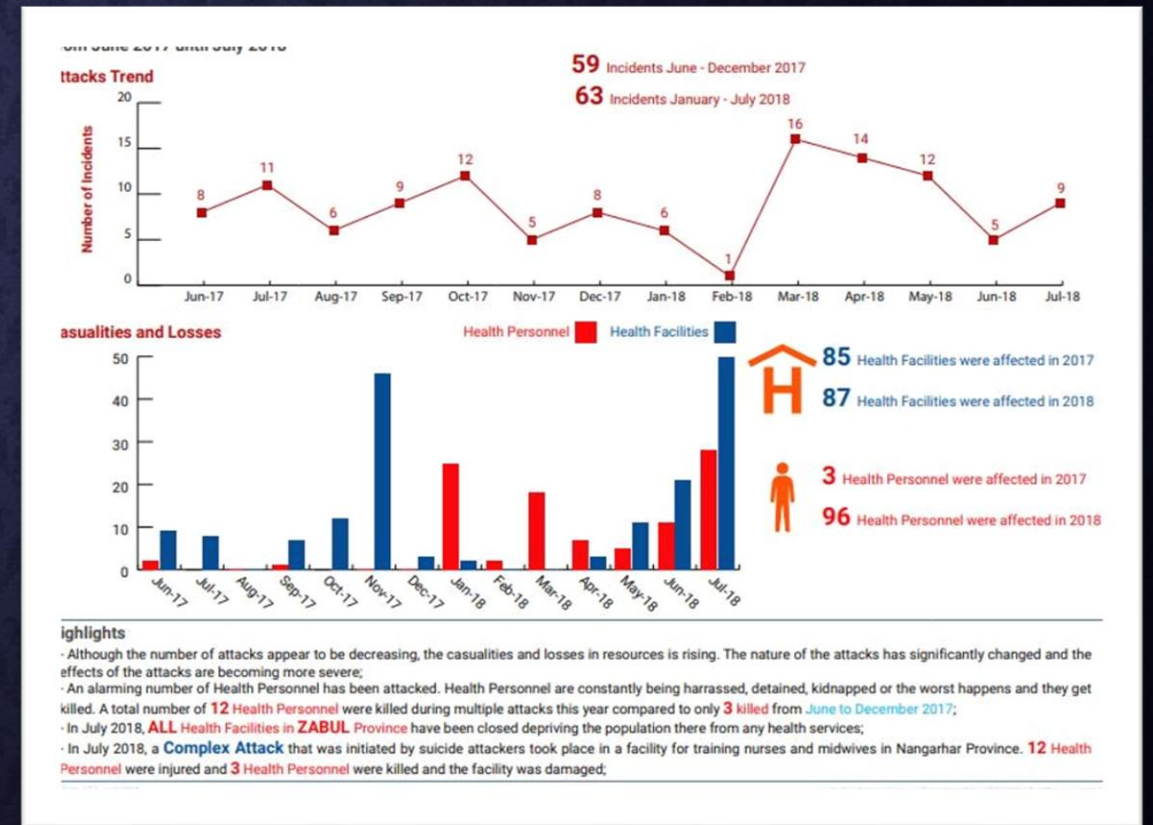
ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

- Recovering from decades of conflict, living standards still among the lowest in the world, highly dependent on foreign aid, and suffering from shortages of housing, water, electricity, and jobs
- GDP (Purchasing Power Parity) \$69.45 billion (2017 est.)
- GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity) \$2,000 (2017 est.)



HEALTH PROFILE

Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	65
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)	4.3
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	61
Contraceptive prevalence, any methods (% of women ages 15-49)	19
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	59
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)	60
Prevalence of underweight, weight for age (% of children under 5)	19.1
Immunization, measles (% of children ages 12-23 months)	64



The current COVID-19 situation

Data reported to WHO in the last 24 hours. Latest update: 14 October 2021, 11:08 am GMT-4.

28

New cases

155 627

Confirmed cases

7 234

Confirmed deaths

LIFESTYLE AND RISK FACTORS

- Diet: Afghan food often high in saturated fat, sodium, red meat, and starch (e.g., flour and rice)
- Western diet (e.g., high-carb drinks, pizza, burgers, etc.) in urban areas
- Lack of awareness about healthy habits
- Lack of information regarding health benefits of sleep and exercise
- Poor sanitation especially in rural areas



DISEASE, DEATH AND DISABILITY

- Causes: Armed conflicts, Natural disasters, Land mines, Hereditary disorders
- Malnutrition and high fertility rate
- Disease and disability often attributed to fate and destiny, God's punishment, or natural phenomena (e.g., cutting during solar or lunar eclipse)
- Lack of awareness and facilities to seek standard treatments, so local religious and traditional healers and practices
- High burden of both communicable and non-communicable disease
- High prevalence of mental health disorders (e.g., MDD, GAD, PTSD, etc.)



CULTURAL VALUES AND PRACTICES

- Core Values: Resilience, Stoicism, Independence, Loyalty, Tribalism, Honor, Compassion, Hospitality
- Spiritual vs. religious
- Patriarchy and matriarchy; firm gender roles
- Close family relationships and support networks
- Sexual orientation and sexual habits; risk of sexual abuse
- Stigma of mental health



DO's

- **Sensitivity to the experiences that Afghan refugees have endured. There is a high occurrence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among those that have witnessed the loss of their family and friends. Many Afghans that have fled to Western countries have had their entire home/village destroyed by the Taliban or other forces, and do not possess any memorabilia.**
- **If the opportunity arises, offer sympathy regarding the current situation in their home country. Afghans are likely to deeply appreciate the gesture and respond with warmth. However, be sensitive not to push for details of their personal experiences in Afghanistan.**
- **Recognize that experiences of persecution differ between ethnicities and be aware that members of minority ethnicities may prefer to identify by their ethnic affiliation.**
- **Be aware that individuals who have been the target of religious persecution may prefer not to discuss faith.**
- **If you are a man, wait for an Afghan woman to initiate a handshake or conversation before doing so yourself. If you are a woman in Afghanistan, wait for your male accompaniment to introduce you to another man before engaging with him (be that shaking his hand, speaking to him or making direct eye contact).**
- **If in a group of Afghan men and women in public, expect the males to talk to each other without the females engaging in conversation after introductions. They may only feel comfortable talking to their own gender once they are together alone.**

DON'Ts

- Do not call Afghans “Arabs” or “Middle Eastern”. Afghanistan is not located in the Middle East. It is a South-Central Asian country composed of many different ethnicities, none of which are Arab.
- Avoid mentioning the topics of ethnic tension, politics, the Taliban, warfare or women’s rights unless your counterpart initiates the conversation, or you have a close relationship with them. These are sensitive subjects in Afghanistan and such discussions can lead a person to recall negative experiences.
- Do not assume that all Afghan Muslims follow a conservative interpretation of Islam. The official position of many Afghan religious leaders does not reflect the interpretations of all Afghan people. For example, not all Afghan Muslim women living in other countries wear the hijab.
- Avoid asking questions that assume Afghan people are uneducated or uncivilized, such as “Do you have phones in Afghanistan?”. Many Afghan are skilled, educated, urbanized and familiar with the technologies of the developed world.
- Avoid telling dirty jokes or making fun of someone in a humiliating way. Such humor is unlikely to be appreciated.
- Afghans avoid losing their temper or complaining about petty things that are not overly significant. Afghans are generally resilient and stoic. Struggle is constantly put into perspective considering those still experiencing extremely violent and dire conditions in Afghanistan, as well as those who have passed away.
- Some people have been separated from relatives or had family members killed. Others may be hesitant to talk about the family they have left in Afghanistan out of fear that it could endanger them.

THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?