



Investing in Youth: How to Realize Afghanistan's Demographic Dividend

Country Office for Afghanistan





Delivering a world where
every pregnancy is wanted
every childbirth is safe and
every young person's
potential is fulfilled

Investing in Youth: How to Realize Afghanistan's Demographic Dividend
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Acronyms and abbreviations	5
Executive Summary	9
Population dynamics and human capital	13
The demographic bonus and investing in adolescents and youth as a strategy to accelerate economic growth and sustainable development	
Background and general context	14
Demographic situation of Afghanistan	20
Policies and strategies for adolescents and young people	
Current demographic situation and trends	21
The age structure: characteristics and expected evolution	28
Implications of these demographic trends for adolescents and youth policies	40
Further considerations and priority interventions	42
Policies with national reach and specific features tailored to particular circumstances	46
Conclusions and recommendations	50
References	54

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMS	Afghanistan Mortality Survey
ANC	Antenatal care
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
BHC	Basic Health
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
CHW	Community Health Workers
COPE	Client-oriented, provider efficient
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
DH	District Hospital
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DOWA	Departments of Women's Affairs
EVAW	Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women
FHH	Family Health Houses
FP	Family Planning
GOIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GWG	Gender Working Group
HAWCA	Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan
HCS	Health Care Service
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HNS	Health and Nutrition Sector
I-ANDS	Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IMR	Infant mortality rate
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHU	Mobile Health Units
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
MNH	Maternal and neonatal health
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan

ACRONYMS

NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHSPA	National Health Services Performance Assessment
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Analysis
OCP	Oral contraceptive pill
PD	Population and Development
PDS	Population and Development Strategies
PHC	Primary health care
PPHD	Provincial Public Health Department
PRMR	Pregnancy-related mortality ratio
RH	Reproductive health
SBA	Skilled birth attendant
SDI	Socioeconomic and Demographic Information
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMA HR	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Human Rights
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
WERS	Women's Economic Rights and Security
WHO	World Health Organization

On behalf of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, I am proud to present *Investing in Youth: How to Realize Afghanistan's Demographic Dividend*. This report, the first of its kind in Afghanistan, depicts a potential for a demographic transition contribution to accelerating socio-economic development.

The demographic data and trends analyzed in this report reveal a unique opportunity to promote Afghanistan's short and long term development through investing in young people by reaping the demographic dividend. Investing in young people during this critical period will shape their lives and the future of Afghanistan that will increasingly depend on them.

With 63 percent of the population below 25 years old, Afghanistan is currently one of the countries with the youngest population in the world. Behind a youth bulge, there is a decrease in infant, child, and maternal mortality rates during the last 10 years. And this positive trend doesn't end there. Afghan youth are marrying later than previously, extending their education period. The total fertility rate has decreased and the use of family planning methods has doubled in the last decade.

These trends point to a gradual decrease in the number of dependents for each working person, which currently places a heavy demand on Afghan society and a burden for the working population.

The report explores these trends concluding with key recommendations to realising the demographic bonus through the implementation of evidence and rights-based policies and programmes focused on youth empowerment, health, higher education and skills development, and expansion of safe and secure employment for young people. As the findings point out, these initiatives of empowerment, education and employment need to ensure that specific areas are targeted, especially those that aim to promote gender equality, focusing on girls education as a way to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The recommendations articulated in the report could build on the latest efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to promote a youth agenda following the parliamentary approval of the first-ever National Youth Policy. The strategy to implement this policy is currently being discussed by key actors under the leadership of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Investing in Youth: How to Realize Afghanistan's Demographic Dividend seizes this momentum to explore the demographic situation, investments and synergies to be taken into account so young people will be at the center of Afghanistan's political and economic agenda.

Dr Annette Sachs Robertson
UNFPA Representative, Afghanistan



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Executive Summary



The relationships between population trends and the wellbeing of people have attracted the attention of scientists for centuries, exploring the interactions between population growth and the people's wellbeing. This line of research has intensified in the last few decades, as the fast demographic evolution has produced profound impacts in the society, the economy and the environment. In addition to population numbers, recent studies have incorporated age population composition and changes over time. Age structural changes have attracted much attention, as a "population bonus" effect has been identified, which has a great potential to accelerate economic growth and development. The impact of the demographic bonus has been demonstrated in several countries, having a significant effect in economic growth, increased saving rates and investments. The potential effects are very important. Yet, in order to fully materialize the potential benefits of the demographic bonus it is necessary that adequate policy frameworks are developed and implemented.

Investments in adolescents and youth are at the center of these policy frameworks. The investments in young people, especially girls, are some of the best decisions that a society can make from an economic perspective. Young people have a full long working life in front of them; if they are supported they would pay back several times the value of such investments. The demographic dividend has added strength to the always sound rationale of investing in adolescents and youth. In fact such investments constitute a moral obligation for all societies, since every child has the right to evolve safely from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. Investments in young people are increasingly recognized as key interventions to reduce poverty and advance sustainable development. The international community has stressed their commitment to uphold the rights of adolescent and young people. In this sense, the UN Population and Development Commission in its forty-fifth session in 2012 adopted the resolution "Adolescents and Youth", which, among others, recommended governments *"...promote both intergenerational equity and solidarity by taking into account the implications of the changing age structures of the population in medium- and long-term development planning and by considering the age-related consequences of social and economic policies, and further calls upon Governments and development partners to make youth development a priority across all sectors"*. The deliberations on the forty-fifth session of this Commission highlighted the central theme of investments in young people for development and poverty reduction, which are broadly recognized today. On the other hand, if young people do not have opportunities to develop, prosper, and contribute to the society they may become dissatisfied, which would act on the conditions that generate social instability and conflict.

The demographic situation of Afghanistan is still characterized by high levels of fertility and mortality. However, important changes are taking place. Infant, child and maternal mortality have started to decrease steadily. Fertility is also declining, and, at the same time, the age at first marriage of girls is being delayed. All these changes characterize a very positive trend. Simultaneously, a strong urbanization process is taking place. Under the right conditions, together these processes can create synergies reinforcing each other to accelerate these trends, bringing about very positive changes in a fast way. In due time,

these changes would induce the age structural changes that will create the conditions for a demographic bonus to take place in Afghanistan. A “youth bulge” is observed already in the Afghan population as result of declining infant and child mortality, as well as because of the previous increases in fertility as health conditions started to improve in previous decades. Fertility has begun to decline; further and faster fertility decline would rapidly determine the emergence of the demographic bonus. This will create very positive conditions to accelerate economic growth and reduce poverty.

Scenarios of low, medium and high levels of fertility in the coming decades were explored, illustrating that economic dependency ratios would change as a consequence of changes in the age structure of the population. The timing and scope of the changes in the dependency ratios would depend on the path of the fertility decline, but in all cases as dependency ratios decline the proper conditions for a demographic bonus will emerge. The prospects for demographic bonus would be most promising if the large cohorts of young people are productively integrated in the society and into the labour force. If these cohorts do not have opportunities, then the frustration may generate social tensions and conflict.

The previous considerations underline why all efforts must be put into securing the best chances to materialize the demographic dividend, which would require adequate economic and social policies for youth development. The rationale for prioritizing investments in young people is strong: there is clear empirical evidence that these investments produce high economic returns. Still, in a context of limited resources and several competing priorities, it is necessary to consolidate political support for these investments. In this sense, additional analysis of existing data sources would strengthen the knowledge base, contributing to improved scenario building for policy design. Additional information may also help to generate stronger empirical evidence in the Afghan context, on the value of investing in young people, particular girls. Everywhere these analyses have demonstrated that investing in girls through childhood and adolescence is an important factor for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Available information reveals that the demographic transition is at a more advanced stage in some segments of the Afghan population than others. This indicates that at least in those specific segments there is already in motion a clear process, which would lead to lowering the dependency ratios within those families and among such population groups. Therefore, this is an opportune time to start implementing appropriate youth policies. Good monitoring and evaluation should accompany those policies, so that the evidence base is better established and strengthened, in order to continually improve the design of these interventions. In due time this evidence base and improved policies will be instrumental for scaling up interventions, expanding the programmes to incorporate new geographic areas and population groups where at the early stages the interventions may be weaker. It is not unusual that at an initial phase interventions may not be strong in some areas because of weak government presence or limited financial and human resources. However, interventions will need to be strengthened as demographic variables evolve and

demographic changes become prevalent in the majority of the population. The sooner an adequate policy framework is developed, tested and evaluated, the better the possibilities the country will be able to conduct effective policy interventions, improving the chances to fully materialize the substantial benefits that a future demographic bonus may offer to Afghanistan.

Part of the necessary strengthening of the knowledge base will be to conduct in depth analyses of the available surveys, fully utilizing the existing information to ascertain with more accuracy the level and trends of fertility and mortality. It is necessary to develop adequate population projections, which can anticipate the most probable future variations in the population trends and how they would impact the population size and the age distribution of the population. At present this information is imprecise, limiting the possibilities to develop adequate scenarios that would allow more precisely exploring the timing of any age structural changes and how these may translate into a demographic dividend for Afghanistan.

In any cases, the current information and available knowledge allow us to anticipate that changes in some sectors of the population are taking place already. Hence, the adoption of a national policy on adolescents and youth should be followed immediately by launching a comprehensive programme focusing on youth, in order to constitute the basis for a sound policy framework that would expand the opportunities of the young cohorts, and in this way significantly enhancing Afghanistan's development efforts and the national strategies to reduce poverty and improve the wellbeing of the Afghan population.

The formulation of a national policy on adolescents and youth indicates that the awareness on the importance of young people for the development of the country is increasing. Previously the national development frameworks, like the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), did not have any particular focus on adolescents and youth and they did not receive special attention either on initiatives to reduce poverty. Nevertheless, it is essential that additional support and awareness creation is emphasized. A strong advocacy campaign should accompany the launching of the policy and strategies on young people, and the knowledge base for these strategies should be further strengthened for more efficient strategy formulation and programme design. The particular relevance that these policy initiatives have in the present context in Afghanistan requires that much more attention is given to these; the need for further attention must be highlighted in order to generate additional political support, to increase and consolidate the priority this development area should have in the public policies. ▣



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Population dynamics and human capital

The demographic bonus and investing in adolescents and youth as a strategy to accelerate economic growth and sustainable development

2.1

Background and general context

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The relationships between population trends and the wellbeing of people have attracted the attention of scientists for centuries. Initially studies have tended to center the attention on the relation of population growth and people's wellbeing or economic growth. Debates frequently confronted views from one end of the spectrum, like the "Malthusian" perspective, that fast population growth would increase poverty as resources may not keep pace with that fast growth (Malthus, 1986[1798]), to positions at the other end, arguing that population growth and the challenges of supplying increasing population numbers would stimulate creativity and innovation, which in turn would generate more wealth (Simon, 1977). A more balanced perspective has gradually emerged, recognizing that fast population growth, under a context of constrained resources, may reproduce and expand poverty; yet, under conditions of abundant resources and relevant investments in new technologies, infrastructure, research and human development, a larger and highly qualified population would represent an important factor to increase productivity and wellbeing. Today there is no doubt that societies which pay close attention to its demographic processes, invest in its human resources, specially children, adolescent and youth, are more successful in their development efforts and are better prepared to face any new challenges as they may emerge.

In the last few decades, the world—and particularly a large number of developing countries—have experienced demographic changes of an unprecedented magnitude. This very fast demographic evolution has had profound impacts in the society, the economy and the environment. The characteristics and the impact of these changes have attracted the attention of scientists, stimulating more research, enhancing methodologies and analytical tools to better understand its nature and consequences. These previous decades of unprecedented demographic change have also sparked debates along political and ideological lines. During the Third World Population Conference in Bucharest, Romania, 1974, all participants recognized the adverse socioeconomic and environmental consequences of rapid population growth, but sharply differed on policies (Sing, 2009nd Edition). While one side emphasized the need to enhance the use of contraceptives and improve family planning services, the other side considered that the necessary demographic changes would only occur through improvements in the social and economic conditions, mortality reductions, and promoting economic and gender equality. During the years following the conference in Bucharest, family planning programmes expanded rapidly and fertility declined in much of the developing world, but remained



high in areas where poverty and women's status had not improved. In a way, this evidence corroborated the merits of both positions in Bucharest (Bruce and Bongarts, 2008).

At the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, 1994, a non-ideological comprehensive approach to population policy was adopted, emphasizing reproductive health, women's rights, and human development (United Nations, 1995). The conference laid the foundation for non-ideological, evidence-based policy development processes, centered on the human beings and guided by a human rights approach. To a large extent the approach adopted at the conference in Cairo also guided developments on adolescent and young people policies as well as gender equality policy frameworks. Supported by a strong evidence base, these policies put the emphasis on development initiatives which are grounded on human rights, addressing human development efforts that prioritize investments in young people's health and education, emphasizing girls' education, gender equality, and overall efforts to alleviate poverty.

AGE STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND THE “DEMOGRAPHIC BONUS”

The world demographic process of the last few decades, described above, attracted the attention not only of demographers but also economists, sociologists and other social scientists. Health improvements and the decline of mortality have improved the welfare of the population and the productivity of the labour force. The decline of fertility has had broad implications, including improvements in the health and socioeconomic status of women, maternal morbidity and mortality, gender relations, family structures, among other, which have interacted in a very positive dynamic of social and economic development. In many developing countries, the fast decline of fertility over a relative short period of time generated changes in the age structure which have had implications for labour markets, productivity, consumption and investment. The analysis of the consequences of changing age structures has been the subject of numerous studies, which have revealed the emergence of a demographic bonus, which has a strong potential for accelerating economic growth.

The demographic bonus emerges from changes in the population age structure. With reduction in fertility the number of births per year decline; while larger cohorts born under high fertility enter the working age, the number under age 15 decline. A larger proportion in working ages favours production, savings and investment over consumption. Economists and demographers have demonstrated that these favourable conditions have played a powerful role in the rapid economic growth and fast economic and social development experienced in several countries (Kelley and Schmidt, 1995). This process has been well documented in some East Asian countries (frequently called the “Asian Tigers”), which in a relative short period of time achieved a high level of development (Bloom and Williamson, 1998). More recently, evidence in this direction has been documented in China and other Asian countries (Mason, 2005), as well as Latin America (Saad, Miller, Martinez, and Holtz, 2008).

The evidence on the potential benefits of the demographic bonus, and its effective contribution to economic growth in several countries is conclusive. However, the degree to which different countries have been able to materialize those potentials, translating them into concrete gains to enhance economic growth and socioeconomic development, has been variable. Essentially the process centers in a significant increase in the proportion of population in working ages as compared to economically dependent age groups. Demographic changes expanding the proportion of working age population do create very favourable conditions; yet, the full materialization of these advantages requires appropriate policy frameworks. The largest benefits are obtained when the favourable age structure combines with job opportunities for the new entrants to the labour force, as well as investments in health, education and technical skills, which enhance the human capital of the new workers.

Enhancing the synergies of the different intervening factors into a comprehensive policy framework properly developed and implemented is essential. Better health for children and

adolescents means they would learn more quickly when they are studying and will have higher productivity when working. Better education will also contribute to higher productivity and more capacity to incorporate new skills that modern manufacturing and the higher productivity service sector require. Investing in the girl child and valuing their contributions to the society and the economy will add a “gender equality bonus” to the demographic bonus, further enhancing those synergies. Simultaneously, economic policies must address job creation in order to avoid unemployment or under-employment of these young cohorts. If young workers are not productively employed, the increasing number of entrants to the job market may create tensions and contribute to social instability, as evidence from some studies indicate (Urdal, 2012).

Investing in the girl child and valuing their contributions to the society and the economy will add a “gender equality bonus” to the demographic bonus, further enhancing those synergies

INVESTMENTS IN ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH AS A STRATEGY TO ACCELERATE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The present document aims to discuss the main features of the demographic changes that lead to the emergence of demographic bonus, and some aspects of the policy framework that may be needed in order to materialize the advantages of the demographic bonus. In this sense, the 45th Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, which was held in April of 2012, had “adolescents and youth” as its central theme. Under the leadership of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in the preparations for this session the UN Population Division called on experts from different regions of the world to present research and discuss on two broad themes: (a) demographic dynamics of youth and (b) youth as agents of socioeconomic development. This paper draws extensively from the work of these experts in the preparation of the forty-fifth Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development.

The sequence of demographic changes that create the conditions for a demographic bonus –also called demographic dividend- usually start with improvements in the health situation, leading to a decline in mortality levels; this is followed by a decrease in fertility, which becomes the driver for age structural changes, leading to declines in the child dependency ratio. Within one to two decades, significant declines in fertility would translate into increases in the proportion of population in the working ages. The demographic bonus emanates from the considerable time lag between the moment the increase in the working age population start, then the bulge in these age groups

transit through the age pyramid as they grow older, and much later start to show up in significant increases in the old-age population group. This time lag creates an opportunity, lasting between two to five decades (depending on the pace of the fertility decline), during which the effects of having large working age cohorts can boost the living standards of the population. A relative larger proportion of population in working ages—as compared to economically dependent population—favors increases in per capita income and increases in national and domestic savings; in turn these favor increasing investments and capital per worker which translates in higher productivity, improved living standards and poverty reduction.

The potential benefits of this bonus, as outlined above, are maximized when an adequate policy framework is in place, promoting higher education, health, and relevant skills and job opportunities for the young cohorts entering the labour force. This policy framework consists of most sensible investments to enhance the human capital of the young cohorts.

The investments in adolescents and youth by themselves represent some of the best decisions a society can make from an economic perspective in all cases.

The investments in adolescents and youth by themselves represent some of the best decisions a society can make from an economic perspective in all cases. Furthermore, the demographic dividend give a strengthened rationale to investing in adolescents and youth. Indeed, beyond being a clever investment, policies investing in adolescent and youth at the same time constitute a moral obligation for all societies. In fulfilling this obligation the society will benefit for a long time from the returns of these investments: young people have a full long working life in front of them. If they are supported and given a fair opportunity they would pay back several times the investments made on them. Investments in young people are in the “best interests of everyone: families, community leaders, nongovernmental organizations, governments, the private sector, the international community, and others alike” (UNFPA, 2012).

On an ethical perspective, to evolve safely from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood is the right of every child. The fulfillment of this right requires that families and societies make sure that “adolescents and youth develop the knowledge, skills and resilience needed for a healthy, productive and fulfilling life. National and global development, security and social justice can only be achieved if adolescents and youth are included as full and active participants” in the development of their societies (UNFPA, 2012). Hence, addressing adolescents and youth rights is central to public policies. This requires “supportive and protective laws and policies; conditions to enable them to complete secondary school at a minimum; training, assets and other support to earn a livelihood and sustain a family when they form one; and timely access to education, information and health services, especially for their sexual and reproductive health”.



Making young people a priority for public policies would be at the center of virtuous circles that benefit the society. On the other hand, some recent empirical evidence suggests that youth bulges are associated with increased risk of political violence (Urdal, 2012). However, governments certainly can mitigate this risk by providing better opportunities for young people, particularly in education and employment. Education as well as jobs is essential. Yet, there is evidence that expanding higher education without corresponding job opportunities for the more highly educated youth, could foster rather than mitigate political instability. The risks of political violence should decline in countries where fertility is also declining: the ensuing reduction in the population dependency ratios would release pressures. Still the risks could remain high in countries where fertility is persistently high, maintaining sustained increases in the cohorts of young people, like in some countries of the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia. ▣



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Demographic situation of Afghanistan

Policies and strategies for adolescents
and young people

The demographic situation for Afghanistan will be explored on the basis of available evidence, evaluating trends and possible scenarios of future evolution. Without a reliable updated national population census, the current population situation and future scenarios depend on a number of assumptions with respect to fertility, mortality and migration trends. Current estimates differ according to the sources of data: CSO estimates smaller total population than the United Nations Population Division. New data may help to clarify this situation. In the meantime, we will use United Nations estimates, because these incorporate indicators on the evolution of age structure, which are essential for the purposes of this analysis. CSO estimates assume constant population distribution by age, which in fact may not be happening since fertility, mortality and migration have been changing. Then, on the basis of possible future scenarios, recommendations will be advanced to support national strategies for adolescent and youth development, including considerations to enhance the potential benefits of the demographic transition, and an eventual “bonus” for Afghanistan. To the degree possible, attempts will be made to identify potential challenges that may tend to reduce the chances of seizing to the fullest extent the opportunity of a demographic dividend.

3.1

Current demographic situation and trends

The level of fertility in Afghanistan has been very high. Most probable estimates (UN Population Division, 2013) suggest that the total fertility rate (TFR) was 7.7 children per woman in 1975–1980, increasing gradually to 7.9 by 1990–1995 and then starting a slow decline, reaching a level of about 6.3 in 2005. Today the TFR is most probably in the range of 5.1 to 6.0 (UNFPA Country Office for Afghanistan, 2012). Fertility in Afghanistan has been characterized by an early age at first birth, short birth intervals and continuing childbearing until advanced ages. These three factors are associated with higher risks of maternal mortality and infant mortality. Furthermore, age at first birth, which is a risk factor for maternal mortality as well as infant and child mortality, is most relevant to policies on young girls. In this context, there is strong evidence that some very positive changes are taking place. Recent surveys have been inconclusive about the exact level of fertility; yet, they strongly indicate that a clearly declining trend is taking place, although the most plausible estimates indicate that currently the TFR is still high: about 5 children per woman (Table 1).

On the basis of this evidence, it is possible to conclude that Afghanistan is already experiencing the first stages of a gradual transition from a high level of fertility to a lower fertility regime. This process is not uniform across the different social groups and geographic areas in the

country. The urban areas and more integrated districts with better access to health services and educational facilities are more advanced in the transition. In the same way, the population groups with higher education level have progressed faster in this transition. Figure 1 illustrates the strong differentials in the average number of children in families at the higher levels of education (2.8 children per woman) as compared to the average number of children in groups with no formal education (5.3 children). The difference is also relevant by area of residence; however, the differences are relatively smaller by area of residence than those observed by education. Probably the effect of urbanization appears mitigated in these estimates due to the impact of a large number of new arrivals in urban areas, which brought with them the fertility patterns prevailing in their areas of origin. As new urbanites integrate into the cities, most probably the level of fertility in urban areas will decrease rapidly. Under the current social, political and economic circumstances it is reasonable to expect that as social investments in education and health expand, fertility transition may accelerate rapidly, particularly in the urban areas, and in provinces and geographic regions which are better positioned to benefit from this expansion in health and education services, and in all geographic areas where the level of urbanization is increasing fast. Indeed, the pattern of rapid urbanization is another strong feature in the demographic proceeds of Afghanistan, and this is closely associated with lower levels of fertility and mortality.

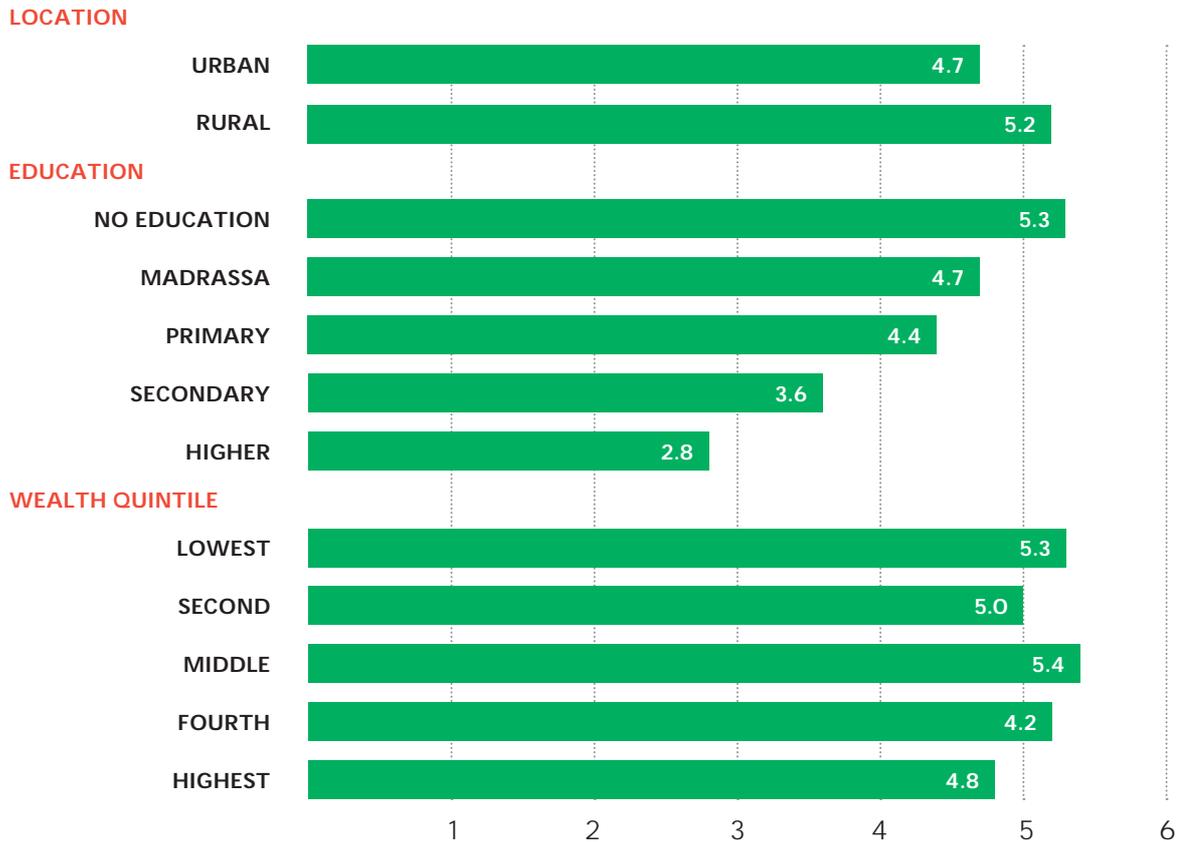
It is expected that urbanization will keep at a fast pace for the next few decades, which would facilitate social and economic

TABLE 1 TOTAL FERTILITY RATE (CHILDREN PER WOMAN), ESTIMATED MEDIUM VARIANT 1980–2055

TIME PERIOD	TOTAL FERTILITY
1980–1985	7.67
1985–1990	7.69
1990–1995	7.70
1995–2000	7.88
2000–2005	7.39
2005–2010	6.33
2010–2015	5.00
2015–2020	4.04
2020–2025	3.32
2025–2030	2.85
2030–2035	2.53
2035–2040	2.29
2040–2045	2.11
2045–2050	1.97
2050–2055	1.86

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision . <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

FIGURE 1 FERTILITY (TFR) BY BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS



Source: AMS, 2010

development: cities bring improved access to education and health, as well as a more diversified economy and better paid jobs. All these favour the development of human capital, especially for young people. In more urbanized areas the high value of investing in children's education is more evident to the families, as education becomes a very strong advantage for young people's access to employment and better paid jobs. This lends a strong rationale for advancing public policies aimed to increase and prioritize investments in youth, and especially in young girls. The benefits of smaller families and investing in children are more evident in the urban areas. At the same time the cost of living, particularly housing, increases significantly in the urban areas, thus reinforcing the preferences for smaller families and the benefits of more investments in those children that the family has had.

The benefits of smaller families and investing in children are more evident in the urban areas



These factors close up a virtuous circle, enhancing the value of public policies centred on adolescents and youth, with the aim to speed up the demographic transition and enhance the potential benefits of a demographic bonus, which can greatly accelerate social and economic development. When these socioeconomic changes occur, if services are available, the utilization of family planning expands rapidly. In Afghanistan, the utilization of family planning has doubled in a relative short period of time (2003–2010), reaching 20 per cent of married women, according to estimates from the Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS). Although overall utilization is still low, the expansion of access has been significant in some population sectors, as seen in differential levels discussed above. Another aspect of the fertility decline in Afghanistan is that although the decline has been observed in all age groups, the strongest decline was registered in the youngest age groups (Table 2).

This is a very positive pattern: it brings about reductions in both maternal as well as child and infant mortality, by decreasing the concentration of births in high risk categories. The fertility reduction in the younger groups may be influenced more strongly by another very positive factor, related to changes in the nuptiality patterns, rather than the increased use of contraception at those very young ages. Notwithstanding, in all cases these trends are highly positive, contributing to strengthen the human capital of the younger generations. Table 2 shows the fertility rates registered in the Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), by age of the mother at the time of birth of the child, at four 5-year intervals preceding the date of the survey: all age groups have registered decreasing fertility levels for the most recent periods of time. However, fertility rates for age group 15–19 in the most recent period have declined



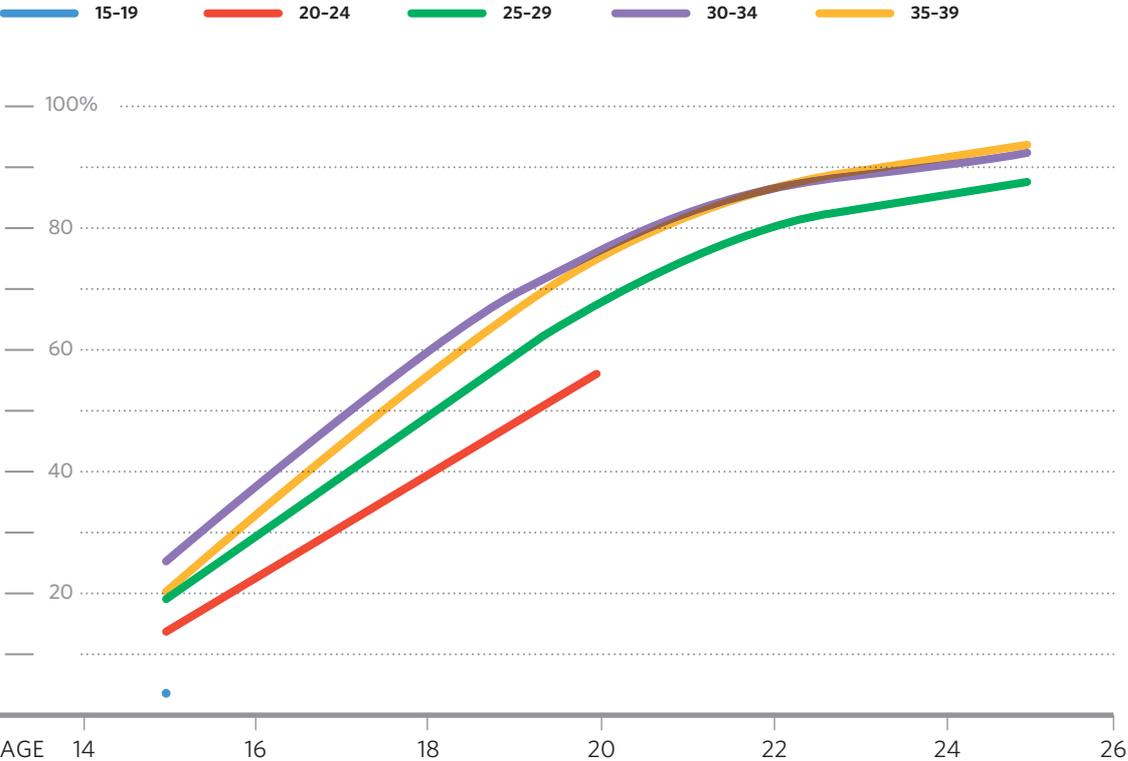
TABLE 2 AGE SPECIFIC FERTILITY BY 5 YEAR CALENDAR PERIODS

MOTHER'S AGE AT BIRTH	NUMBER OF YEARS PRECEDING SURVEY			
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19
15-19	90	146	175	194
20-24	279	333	351	352
25-29	287	350	354	356
30-34	235	289	316	[359]
35-39	145	217	[257]	
40-44	68	[143]		
45-49	[28]			

Note: Age-specific fertility rates are per 1,000 women. Estimates in brackets are truncated. Rates exclude the month of interview.

Source: AMS

FIGURE 2 PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN MARRIED AT EXACT AGE BY CURRENT AGE CATEGORY



to less than half the level observed for this age group during the period of 15 to 19 years ago. While fertility in other age groups has also decreased, none of the other groups presents such a strong decline.

These changes are consistent with changes in the nuptiality patterns: during the recent period, the age at first marriage has increased consistently for the younger cohorts of women (Figure 2). In Figure 2, for women aged 15-19 at the time of the survey, the percentage of those who had married at age 15 is less than 5 per cent (indicated by a single blue colour point in Figure 2). The successive lines, indicating the age at marriage for women in the different age groups at the time of the survey, show higher percentages of married girls at every age for older cohorts. That is, girls have been consistently marrying at older ages in the most recent years during the last decade. These trends imply lower frequency of childbearing in the younger ages (categories of high risk), thus creating conducive conditions to bring down maternal as well as infant and child mortality levels. The level of pregnancy related mortality (from the AMS) is estimated at 327 deaths per 100,000 births, while a joint United Nations study¹ indicates a level of 400. Even if this indicator is affected by some level of omission

1 WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, The World Bank and United Nations Population Division: "Maternal Mortality 1990-2013"



and it may underestimate the true level (a study published in *The Lancet* in 2005 suggested a rate of 1600 for the country in 2002), it reveals a remarkable progress from levels which previously were clearly above a thousand maternal deaths per hundred thousand live births. Though having recorded a remarkable progress, “the current level still implies a lifetime risk of pregnancy-related mortality of 2 per cent” (UNFPA Country Office for Afghanistan, 2012).

The positive demographic changes described above have combined with a significant expansion in the access to services, as result of the new health strategies (Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2011). Antenatal as well as skilled birth attendance and post-natal care have been steadily increasing, especially for young mothers, as AMS and other surveys show. In spite of this remarkable progress, current levels of care are still low compared to international recommendations; hence these efforts have to be maintained and strengthened. The focus on the adolescents and young girls are an important feature, and should be further strengthened through targeted investments, as it generates additional multiplicative beneficial effects.

3.2

The age structure: characteristics and expected evolution

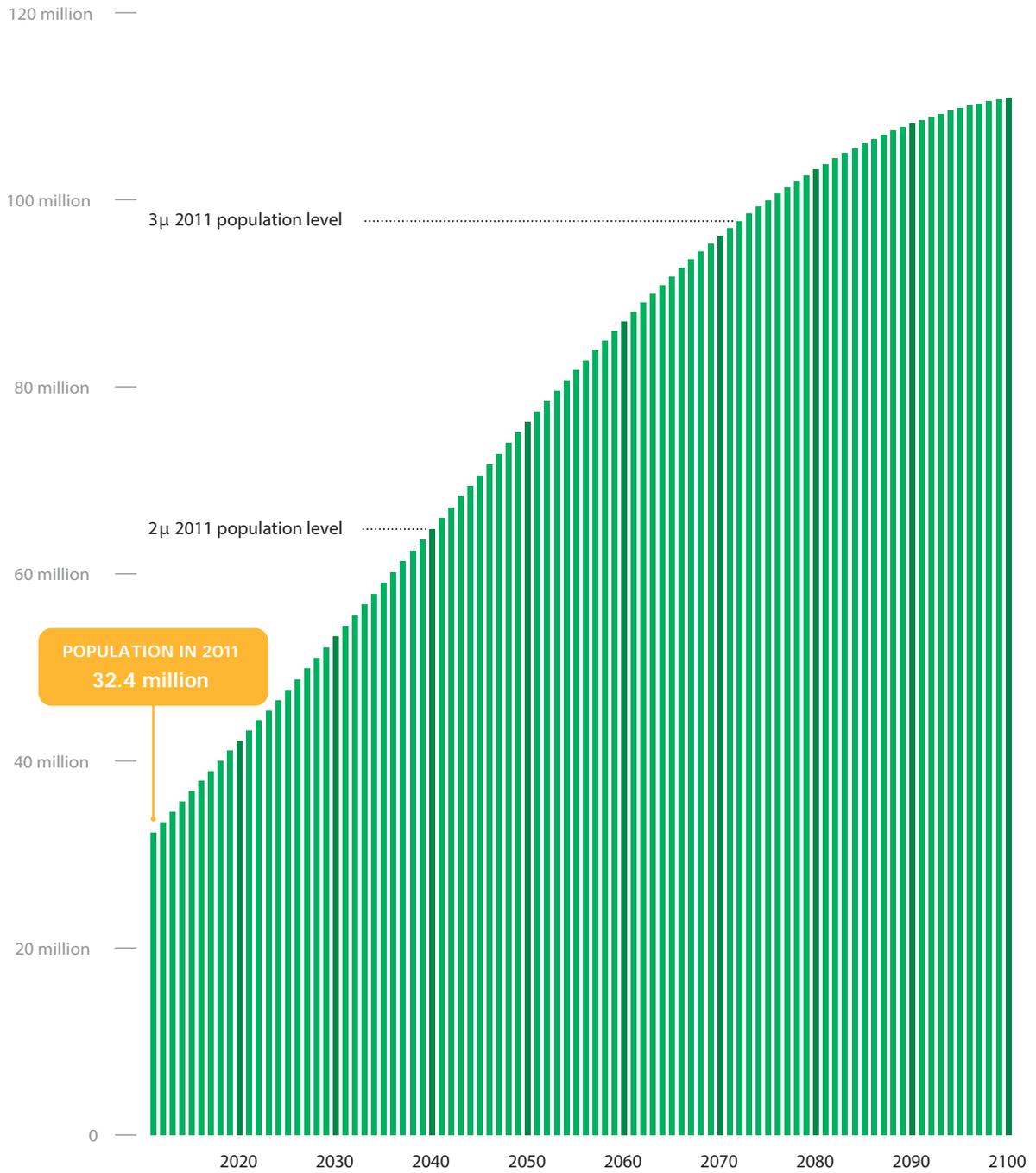
Because of past and present high levels of fertility, Afghanistan has a very young age-structure; in the last two decades (1990–2010) almost half the total population was under 15 years of age, and more than two third were under 25. Compared to the young age groups, the proportion of people 65 years of age and older has been, and still is, very small (less than 3 percent). The dependency ratio (persons below 15 plus those 65 and older per 100 persons in the working age groups 15–64 years) is over 100; that is more than one dependent for each working age person (UN Population Division, 2013). This represents a heavy demand on the society and a significant burden for the working population. It also highlights the potential benefit that an impending fertility decline and subsequent change in the age structure would represent, generating a demographic dividend, as described in previous sections. It is important to note that the key factors in this analysis are the relative weights of the different age groups; as stated before, there are some uncertainties on the exact population numbers due to lack of a complete updated census in the country, but variations in the absolute numbers do not have an impact on the relationships between these proportions. Hence, those uncertainties would not affect these analysis and conclusions.

To have a better perspective in quantitative terms, the estimated population size of Afghanistan (UN Population Division, 2013) is presented in Figure 3, and the annual population change in absolute numbers is presented in Figure 4, for the period 1980–2055.

As indicated before, the population figures used by the United Nations, which appear in Figure 3, are higher than those adopted by CSO, but the differences in absolute terms do not affect the essence of the analysis, which is based on relative numbers in the age distribution of the population. The aim of the Figure 3 is to show the intense growth potential of the Afghan population, due to the high fertility level and the momentum in-built in the young age structure, which will generate demographic growth even if fertility is declining rapidly. The evolution of total population is the response to the estimated trends in fertility, and to the evolution of the age structure of the population evolution, which is presented in Figure 6. Mortality and migration also intervene in these trends, but their impact is relatively small in these estimates, as compared with the previous two factors.

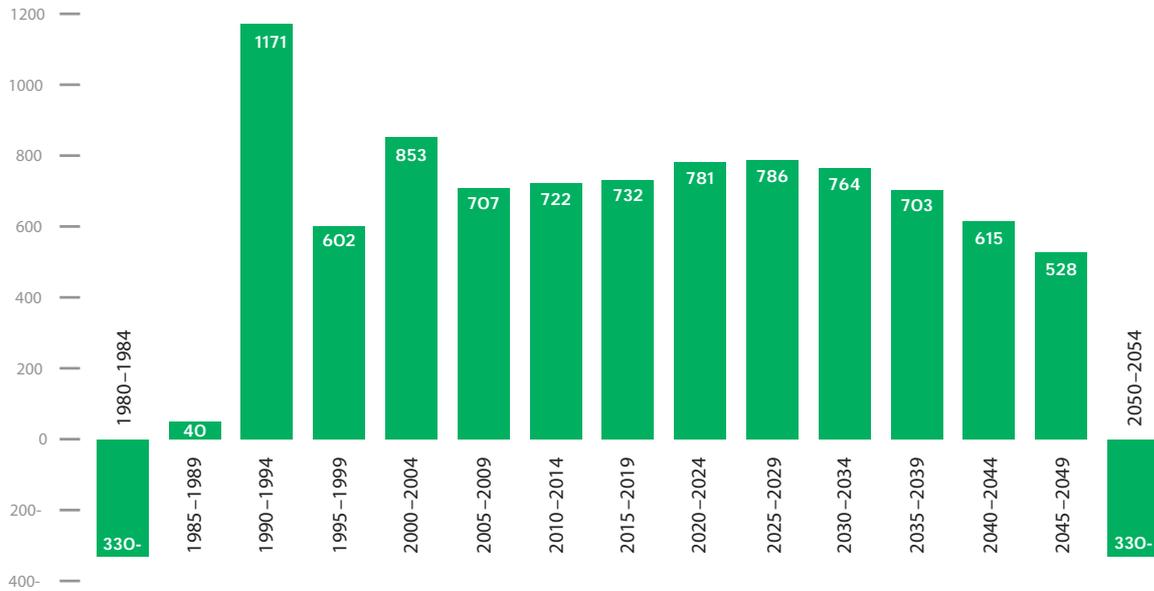
In the next five years about four million people will be added to the Afghan working age population, while around 400 thousand would be leaving it as they reach the age of retirement (here considered to be at 65 years old). The additions to the working age population are expected to increase until 2050, when they reach a maximum of about 4.9 million, to start

FIGURE 3 AFGHANISTAN POPULATION PROJECTION (MEDIUM VARIANT)



Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision .
<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

FIGURE 4 AFGHANISTAN POPULATION CHANGE PER YEAR (THOUSANDS), MEDIUM VARIANT 1980-2055

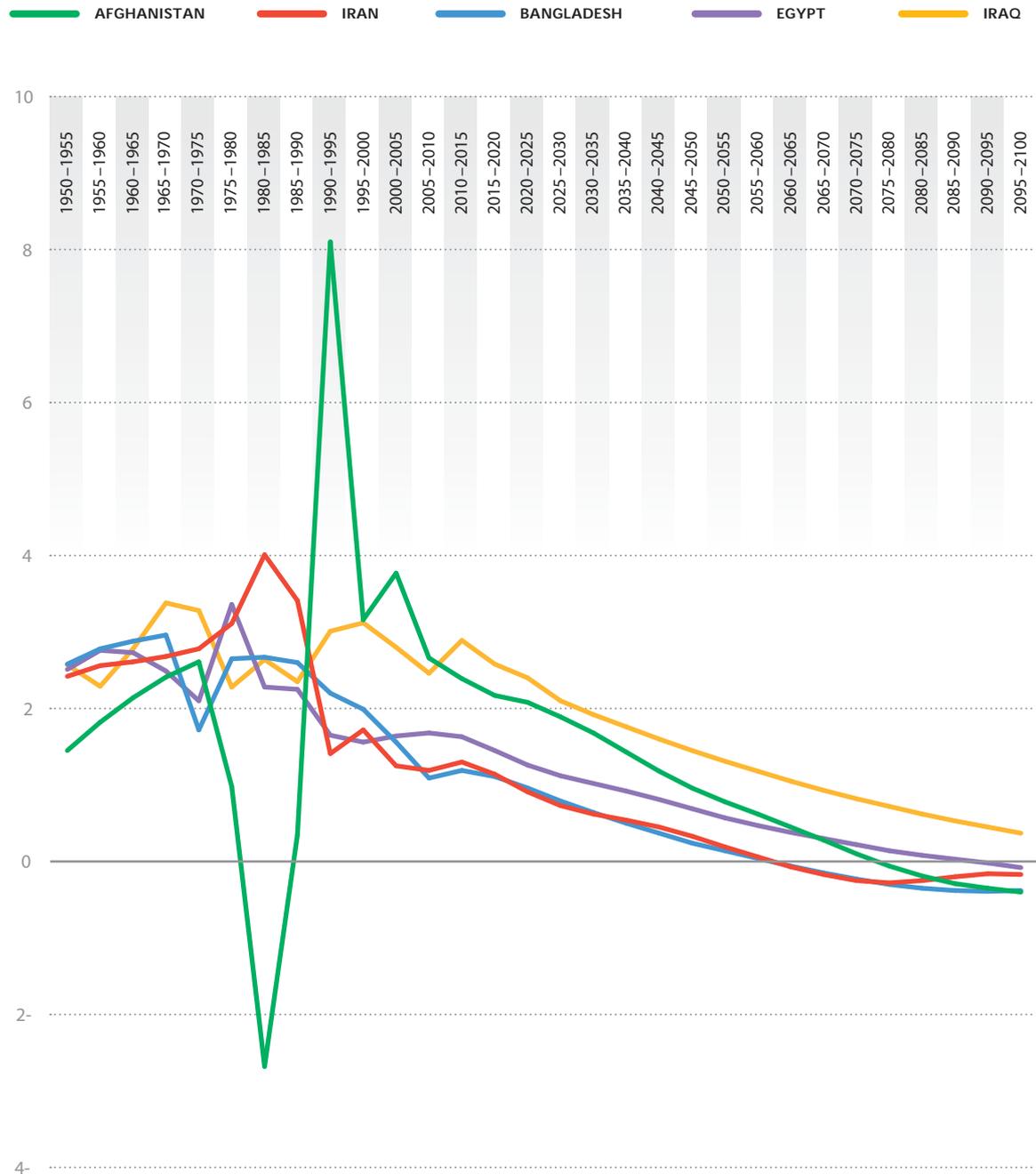


Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

slowly decreasing from then on (UN Population Division, 2013). By 2050 the cohorts leaving the working age would be just over one million every 5 years. This implies that the size of the working age population is expected to increase consistently by more than three million every 5 years for the next 40 years. Figure 4 shows the yearly absolute increases to the total population.

In order to compare these trends with those observed in other countries, Figure 5 presents the annual population growth rate for a selected group of countries. Some differences can be observed in Afghanistan with respect to other countries. The growth rate in 1950 in Afghanistan is lower than in other countries, mostly reflecting higher mortality rates. For a period until 1975 the growth rate in Afghanistan increased as result of both increasing fertility level and declining mortality due to improving health conditions. From 1965 to 1975 the growth rate for Afghanistan showed a level which was closer to those registered in these other countries. The period from 1975 until 1995 shows very irregular fluctuations, reflecting great population upheavals including out migration and return migration recording very low and negative growth from 1975 to 1990, and a very high rate (8.1 per cent) in 1990 to 1995. In 2000, Afghanistan initiates a steady decline in the rate of growth, starting from a very high level (the highest for this group of countries). Although the expected decline is important, the rate of growth may remain higher than those countries, except Iraq, until 2060.

FIGURE 5 ANNUAL POPULATION GROWTH RATES IN PERCENTAGES, FOR SELECTED COUNTRIES, MEDIUM VARIANT, 1950-2100



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

FIGURE 6 AFGHANISTAN: EXPECTED FUTURE EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION AGE STRUCTURE

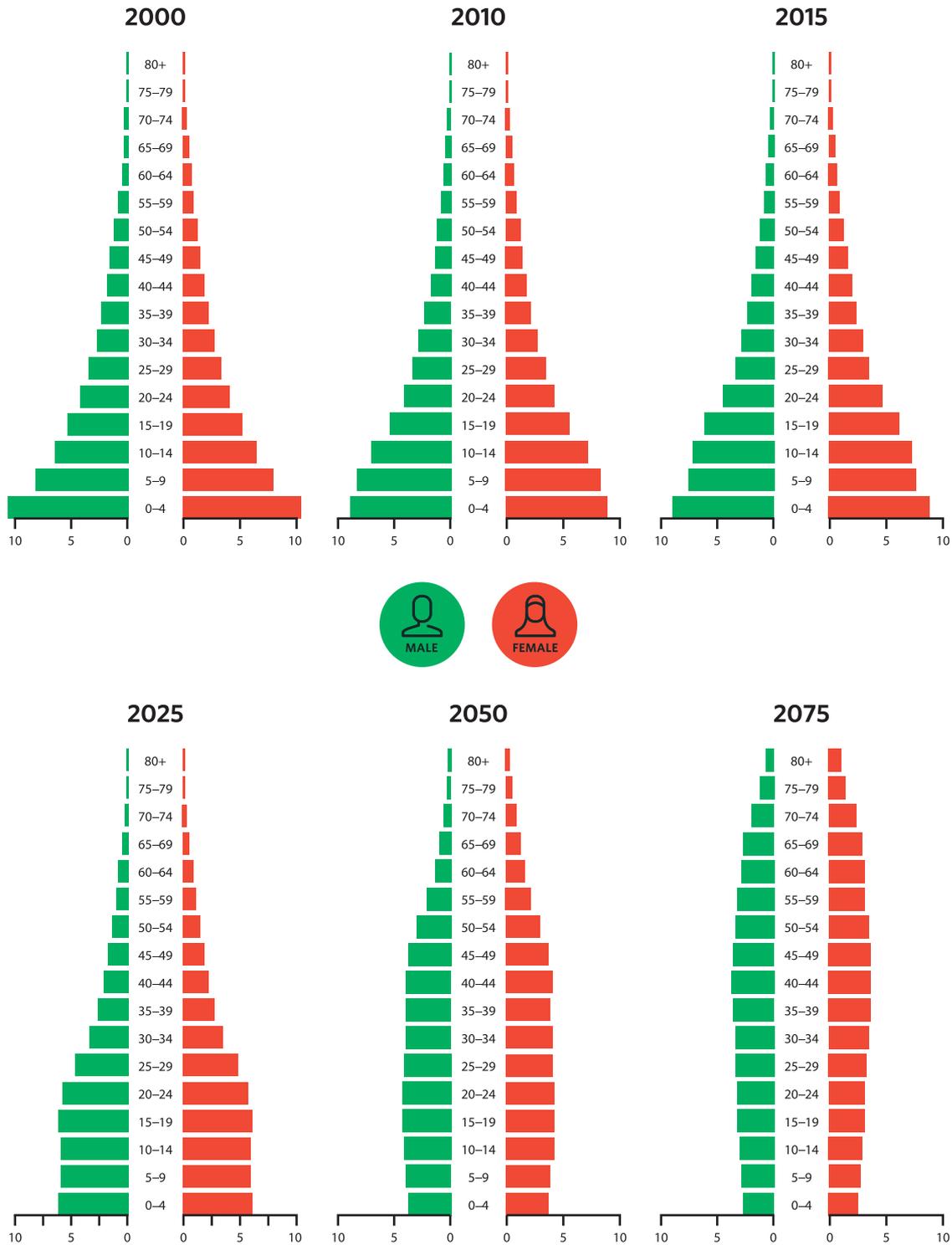
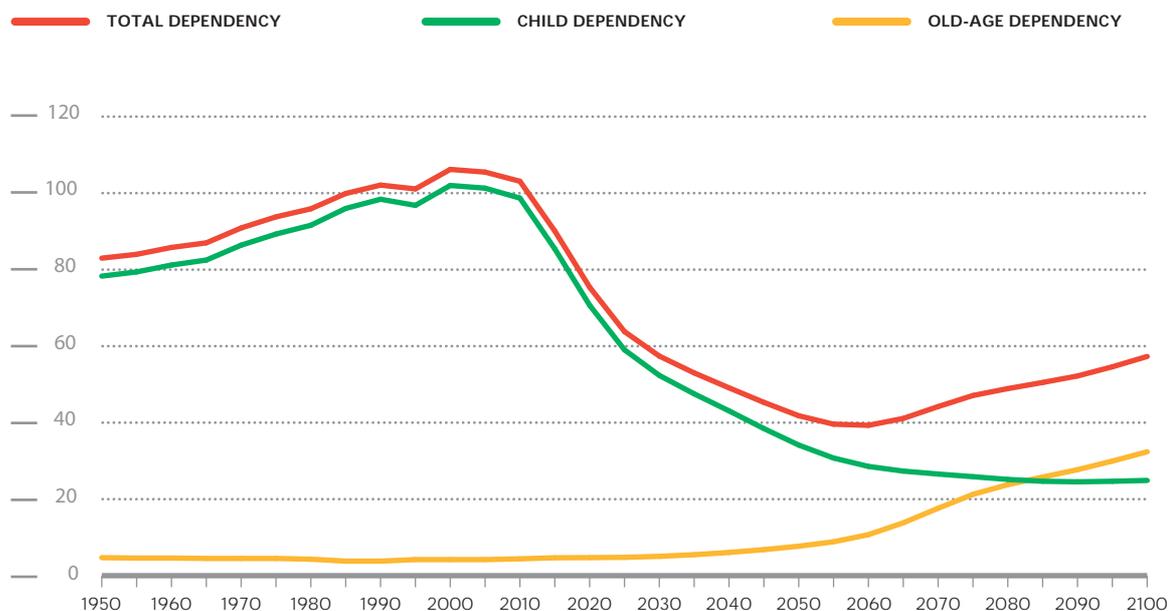


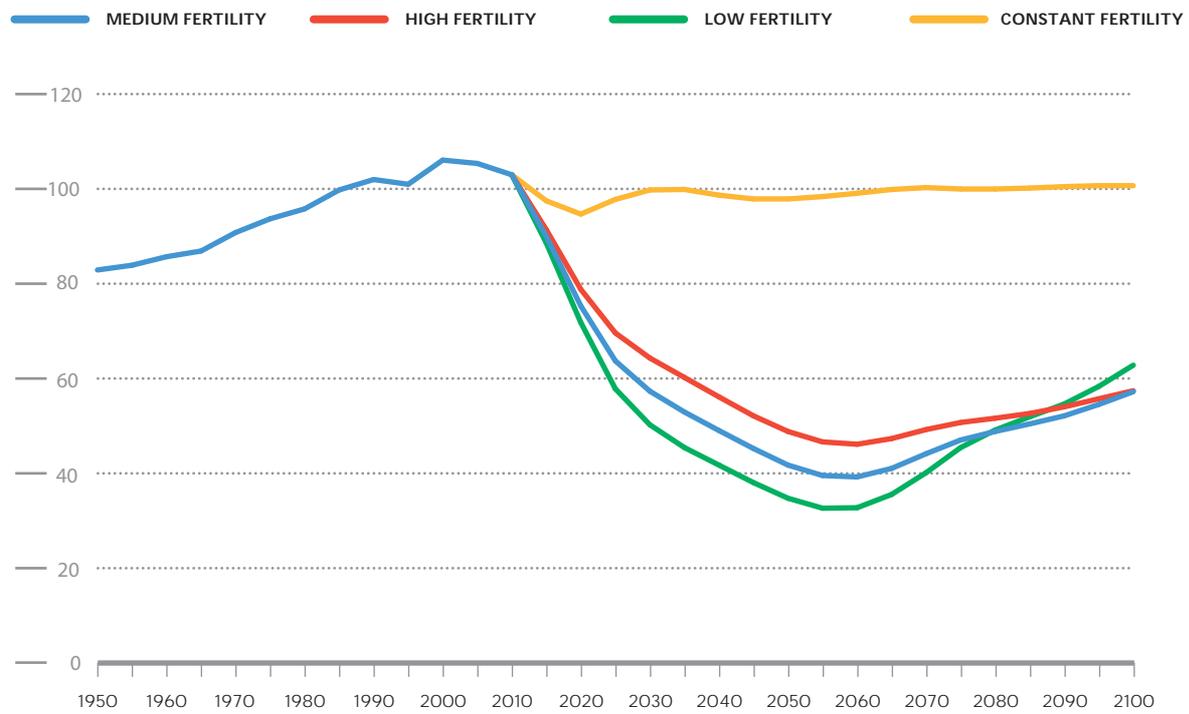
FIGURE 7 AFGHANISTAN DEPENDENCY RATIOS, 1955 –2100



Nevertheless, for the purposes of adolescents and youth policies, and the perspective of a demographic dividend, the most relevant patterns pertain to the population age structure. These can be explored in Figure 6, which presents the population pyramids, showing the expected evolution of the population distribution by 5-year age groups, under the assumption that the fertility level will follow a moderate declining trend (the medium level as it was presented in Table 1). It can be seen that until 2010 the pyramids show the classical broad base of very young populations, with a high fertility. The median age of the Afghan population by 2010 was estimated at 16.5 years, which is the seventh youngest age structure of any country in the world. Similarly, Afghanistan is among the group of countries that have the highest proportion of people in the age groups between 0 and 14 years of age. The gradual expansion of the age groups between 15 and 64 years of age, which correspond to the working age population, appears clearly in the pyramids from 2015 onwards.

The projection assumed that fertility will decline gradually and at a relative slow pace. Hence, under this scenario the Afghan population is expected to evolve from the present broad base pyramid to a more rectangular shape by 2050; that is, over a period of 35 to 40 years. During this period the relative weight of the working age population will steadily increase, from a level of 48 per cent in 2000 to 71 per cent in 2050. The groups under age 15 will decrease and those above 65 would only register a small increase from 3 to 5 per cent. By 2050, the proportion of the population older than 65 would have just started to increase, so the impact of old-age dependency still would not be very strong, as it is expected to be by 2075, when the group older than 65 will reach about 20 per cent. After 2080 there would be more old-age dependents than child dependents. The evolution of the dependency ratios is showed in the time series presented in Figure 7.

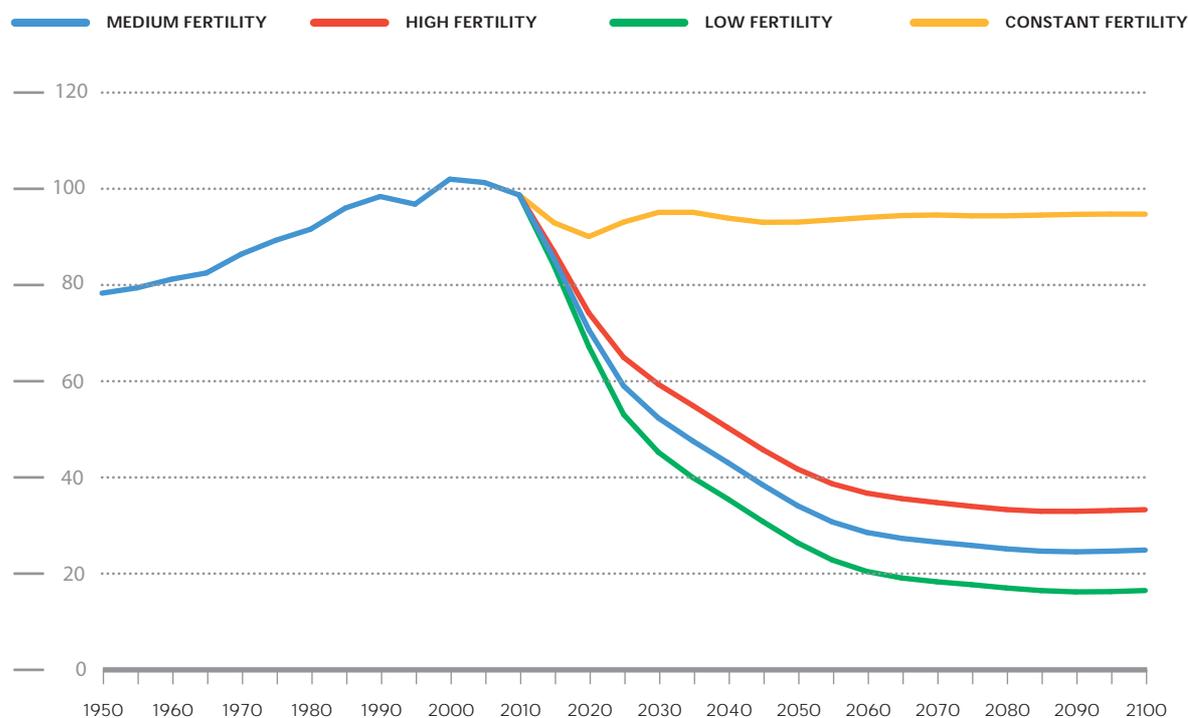
FIGURE 8 EXPECTED VALUE OF TOTAL DEPENDENCY RATIOS ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF FERTILITY, AFGHANISTAN



In order to better appreciate the implications of the fertility changes and its impact on dependency ratios, scenarios of constant fertility, high, medium and low fertility trends are presented in Figure 8. The implications are apparent: as fertility was increasing from 1950 until about 2000, the total dependency ratio increased from 80 dependent per 100 persons in the working age group, to about 110 dependent per 100 in working age. A higher number of dependents than working age people represent a heavy burden on the labour force and the economy, and this has been the situation in Afghanistan during the last decade.

If fertility would keep constant at the current level, the total dependency ratio would remain constant at about 100 (the gold line in Figure 8). Instead, under a scenario of low fertility (which implies a TFR of 4.75 in 2015, decreasing to 2.03 by 2030–2035, and to 1.4 by 2050) represented by the green line in Figure 8, the dependency ratio would start to decrease immediately, and by 2050–2060 there would be three persons in the working ages for each dependent person. Then it would start to increase, as old dependency increases, reaching about 60 per cent by 2100. The medium fertility scenario (blue line) follows a similar pattern, but the total dependency ratio does not fall below 40 per cent

FIGURE 9 EXPECTED EVOLUTION OF CHILD DEPENDENCY RATIOS ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF FERTILITY, AFGHANISTAN



at the minimum level, starting then to increase. The TFR value under this assumption was presented in Table 1. The assumption of high fertility implies a TFR of 5.25 in 2015, decreasing to 3.03 by 2030–2035, and reaching a level of 2.36 by 2050; in this case (red line) the minimum level of the dependency ratio would be about 50 per cent (that is two in working age for each dependent).

The analysis of the dependency ratios under these assumptions reveals an important pattern: it indicates that the strongest effects of the demographic bonus would be associated with the sharpest declines in fertility, which would determine a higher working age percentage compared to the group under age 15: about two thirds in working age under low fertility, compared to one half under a high fertility scenario. The lowest the dependency ratio, the highest will be the capacity of families and the society to generate saving and economic surpluses for productive investments. Another important pattern can be highlighted by presenting separately the evolution of the child dependency ratio and the old-age dependency ratio. Figure 9 presents the child dependency ratio: once fertility starts to decrease, the ratio consistently declines, and the rate of decline is faster and sharper the faster the fertility would decline.

FIGURE 10 EXPECTED EVOLUTION OF OLD-AGE DEPENDENCY RATIOS ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF FERTILITY, AFGHANISTAN

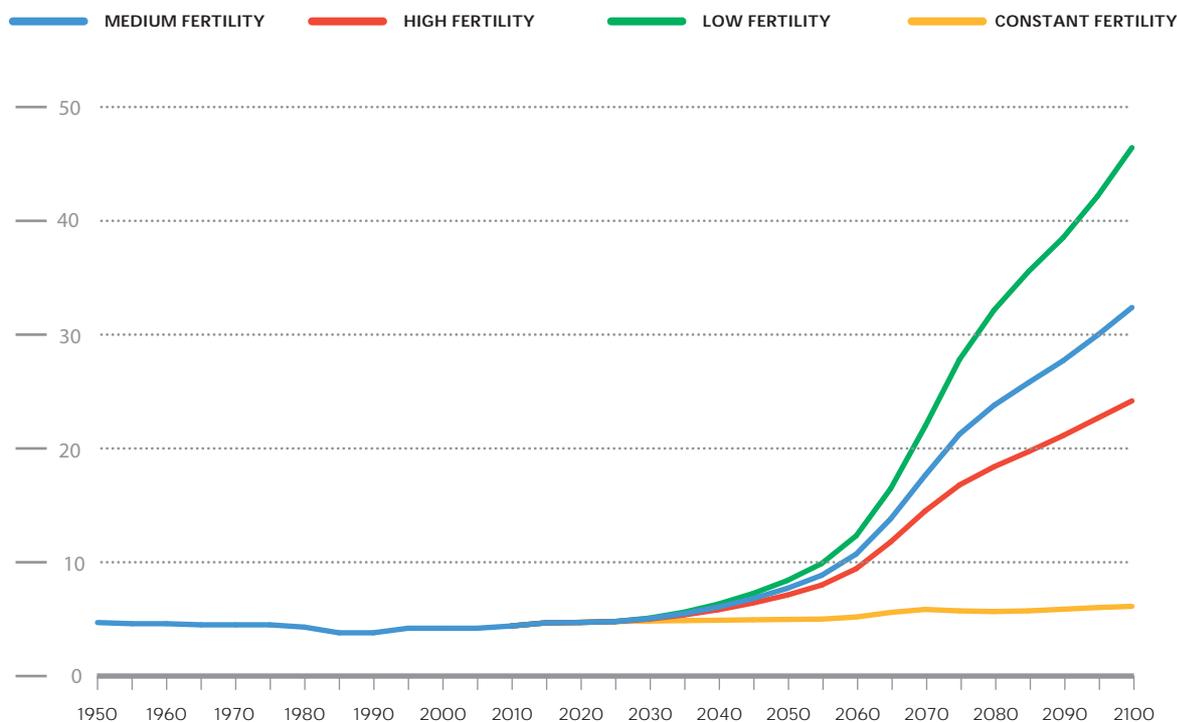


Figure 10 shows the evolution of the old-age dependency ratio: after the child dependency declines, the old dependency ratio continues almost constant at a low level for some decades. The benefits from the demographic bonus emanate from this time lag: child dependency declines but old-age dependency remains low for several years. Old-age dependency starts to increase about 40 to 50 years after the moment the proportion of working age population begins to increase, and from there on the working age proportions increase fast. After this time lag, the sharper the fertility had declined, the fastest and sharper the old dependency ratio would increase, as can be observed in Figure 10.

The green line, corresponding to the low fertility scenario, increases earlier and rises to the highest level. That means that the highest potential benefits from the demographic bonus during the period of favorable levels of the dependency ratio (which are achieved with faster and sharpest fertility declines), would later be associated with a faster growth of old-age groups and higher demands to attend social security and pensions. This should not be a concern: if the opportunity of the demographic bonus has been properly seized, the returns from the bonus would ensure that resources should be enough to increase the living standards for all, and adequately provide for future services after retirement. It is important, however, to underline that the society must put in place all necessary policies



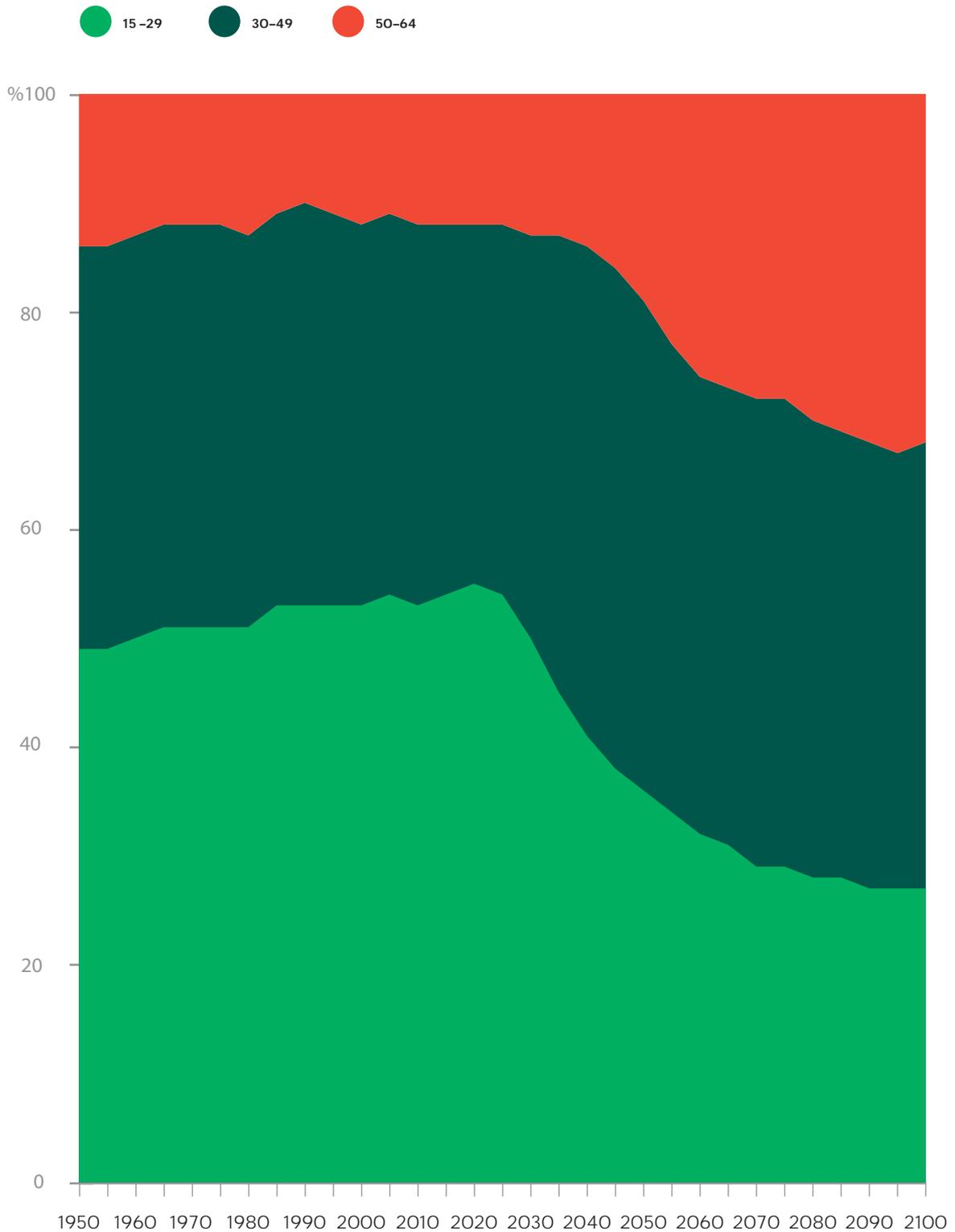
and programmes to ensure that the benefits of the demographic bonus do materialize during the favorable period of the transition.

Noting that in addition to skills, the experience and maturity of the labour force have implications on the productivity as well as on the level of income they would gain, then another important factor that plays a significant role in the effects of the demographic bonus is the proportions of the working age population in the ages 30–49, 15–29 and 50–64. (In Figure 11 the addition of the three percentages lines, in any date, is 100 per cent—that is total of the population in working ages). At a similar level of skills and qualifications, the remuneration increases with the experience and maturity of workers. In general, by the late forties and in the fifties the staff achieves the highest productivity, which is reflected in the remuneration. At the same time, the structure of saving and spending changes with age, and in accordance with the life cycle and family structures. Demographer-economists have coined the concept of a “second demographic dividend” to characterize the process through which during their fifties, and as they approach retirement age, people start to plan for their retirement, increasing their savings and investments. At the aggregate level of the economy, this change in the age composition of the labour force has a remarkable impact. During the initial stages of the demographic



dividend process (around 2015-2020 in Figure 11) the younger group is much larger. Then, as the smaller cohorts—born after the fertility begun to decline—reach the working age, the younger group starts to shrink and the 30-49 would grow. Subsequently it is the group 50-64 which would grow faster, becoming even larger than the group 15-29; as 50-64 is the age when saving for retirement plans intensify, during this stage the “second dividend” takes place, significantly increasing the savings and the per-capita investment per worker. This raises the productivity and the rate of economic growth in a significant way. Some studies indicate that the second dividend may have even a stronger impact in economic growth than the first dividend, when the larger increases in absolute numbers took place in the working age population.

FIGURE 11 AFGHANISTAN'S EXPECTED EVOLUTION OF THE WORKING AGE POPULATION (15-69), ACCORDING TO THREE AGE GROUPS, 15-29, 30-49, 50-64



3.3

Implications of these demographic trends for adolescents and youth policies

From the previous analysis, it is clear that Afghanistan is facing a demographic process with significant increases in the young people's cohorts, as result of very high fertility during the past decades. This is often characterized as "youth bulge". The youth bulge is associated with both increased opportunities and with risks, which are discussed later, depending on the capacity to incorporate the large cohorts of young people productively in the society. Simultaneously, there is evidence that fertility levels have started to drop. This process is more advanced among the population groups with higher level of education and in the urban areas. Social investments in young people are under any situation among the investments that have the highest returns for any society. Particularly for countries that show a significant youth bulge and are on the verge of a fertility reduction process, investments in young people can play a catalytic role to decisively advance toward a healthy, socioeconomically productive and poverty free society; in this demographic context the society can additionally benefit from the positive effects of a demographic bonus.

Today the policies in Afghanistan must be geared toward accelerating the important positive changes that are already in motion, and enhance the benefits emanating from those changes. These are reflected in lower fertility rates for some groups of the population, significant declines in the fertility rates of the younger age groups and increasing age at first marriage. At the same time urbanization has been accelerating. The rate of urban population growth is reaching around 4.5 per cent (UN Population Division, 2013). This would double the total urban population in 15 years, while the total population, growing a little over 2 per cent, would take about 35 years to double the present size. Some aspects of urbanization, like overcrowding and the high visibility of poverty in the cities are perceived as negative implications of urban growth. However, it is clear that urbanization is a strong force for progress, which can contribute to disseminate and facilitate access to education, health, a more diversified labour market, new technologies and better paid jobs, increasing wellbeing and reducing poverty (UNFPA, 2007.b). Individual choices and opportunities would expand and these will be reflected in the population dynamics, further lowering fertility and reducing dependency rates.

Adequate policies, as delineated in the ICPD Programme of Action, focusing on the empowerment of individuals—especially young people and girls—and rights-based policies, including access to sexual and reproductive health care, education beyond the primary level and with a focus on girls, and the empowerment of women, would make an enormous difference in terms of human development. Under these circumstances it is most likely that favorable demographic conditions including age structural changes would emerge in urban areas relatively fast. Even if this is initially



restricted to the urban context, the conditions for a localized demographic dividend would have the potential to materialize in a relative short period of time. Empirical evidence indicates that once the relevant changes start to take place in a particular sector of the society, they tend to spread more rapidly to the rest of the population.

It is important that adolescent and youth policies and development programmes must not be perceived as a “complementary initiative addressing a particular target group” or a “social initiative for disadvantage or vulnerable groups”. Under the particular circumstances of Afghanistan, adolescent and youth policies must be central to all national development initiatives and poverty reduction strategies (UNFPA, 2010). Adolescents and youth do not constitute the “future” of the country; they are the present and are most relevant to the success of all development endeavors for Afghanistan. On the other hand, while young people are essential assets for development and can never be seen in a negative light, it is also important to keep in mind that the failure to incorporate them in the society and

Adolescents and youth do not constitute the “future” of the country; they are the present and are most relevant to the success of all development endeavors for Afghanistan

into the development process entails risks of increased social instability and conflict. The opportunities of a favorable demographic context must be fully seized, and this cannot be achieved without priority investments in the currently large cohorts of adolescents and young people today.

The potential benefits of the demographic bonus are undeniable; several countries have completed this process already with economic growth rates significantly enhanced by a demographic dividend. In Afghanistan a widespread age structural transition may not be imminent, but relevant changes are already taking place in sectors of the society and the conditions to benefit from those changes must be established. In order to reap the full benefits of this dividend it is necessary to put in place a coherent policy framework, as referred to earlier in this document. Such policy framework must contribute to a comprehensive development of adolescents and youth, rather than a piecemeal approach. It has to incorporate education, livelihoods, sexual and reproductive health, as well as promoting participation and full citizenship for the young generations. When all these components are properly addressed significant synergies are unleashed and the most dynamic social and economic development can be achieved. Hence, the adolescents and youth policies and programmes must be placed within the broad framework of a holistic development for young people, integrated with poverty reduction strategies and social and economic sustainable development. Policy initiatives must promote opportunities for girls and boys to “develop their full potential, to freely express themselves and have their views respected, and to live free of poverty, discrimination and violence” (UNFPA, 2007.a).

3.4

Further considerations and priority interventions

Although important investments have been made in the last decade to strengthen the statistical information in the country, the knowledge base regarding the demographic and socioeconomic situation of Afghanistan is still incomplete. The statistical information on which the situational analysis of the previous section is based is incipient and should be expanded. Improving the knowledge base for adolescent policy decision making is an essential trait of Afghanistan's ANDS vision of building a strong knowledge base, which is essential for the Government of Afghanistan to “lead programs with a national reach that provide for the unique circumstances of different provinces and districts” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010). Attending to the circumstances of ethnic groups, provinces and districts imposes additional demands on socioeconomic and demographic information (SDI).



Policy strategies, formulated on a strong knowledge base with the aim to promote opportunities for girls and boys must address some critical elements:

- Empower adolescents and youth, girls and boys, with skills to achieve their goals, enabling them to think critically, negotiate risky situations, and express themselves freely.
- Provide access to health, including sexual and reproductive health information, education, commodities and services.
- Connect young people to livelihood and employment programmes.
- Uphold the rights of young people, specifically girls and marginalized groups, to grow up healthy and safe.
- Encourage young people to participate fully in the country's development process.
- Recognize the rights of young people to a fair share of education, skills, and services, with a special focus on economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized groups.

Afghanistan has been characterized by very early onset of childbirth and young ages at marriage. In this context the attention to the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and youth becomes an essential policy component. Attention should include adolescents below age 15. Since some girls are married below age 15, the coordination with the education sector is fundamental. Gender-sensitive, life-skills-based sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education should be incorporated in the education system. SRH with a special focus on the younger girls are fundamental requirements, and these will have several positive consequences:

- Would favour faster decline in fertility, particularly decreasing childbearing below the age of 18;
- Would facilitate a longer stay in the education system, improving human capital for development
- Would contribute to faster decline in maternal and child mortality and improved health and nutrition of women and children;
- By accelerating the fertility decline it would accentuate a more favourable dependency ratio, enhancing the potential impact of the demographic dividend;
- Empirical evidence shows that investing in young girls is a powerful factor in breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Knowles and Behrman, 2003).

Several initiatives in this line have started already in the context of the Afghan National Development Strategy (Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008), as well as the Public Health Strategic Plan (Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2011) and the National Child and Adolescent Health Strategy (Ministry of Public Health, 2009). Furthermore, the empirical evidence provided by some surveys indicates that sensible progress has been achieved, as observed in the increases in the age at first marriage and in the reductions in the fertility rates at the younger ages.

These improvements are most relevant and reveal that progress can and is being achieved, but it is still insufficient. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a corner stone of young people's transition to adulthood, influencing development outcomes in several fronts. A broader access to SRH is absolutely necessary to reach further to all sectors of the society. Special approaches have been incorporated in the National Child and Adolescent Health Strategy, to promote delaying of first pregnancy, targeting not only adolescents (both girls and boys), but also decision makers in the family (mothers, fathers and mothers in law) and community (village leaders and religious leaders) who influence the reproductive health and behavior of adolescents. The delay in the age at first marriage and the decline in fertility rates, especially at the younger age groups that have been observed, indicate that these

approaches are beginning to produce good results. They must be further emphasized and expanded.

The National Child and Adolescent Health Strategy addresses SRH education in the education system, including improving the communication and counseling skills of the teachers, in order to incorporate a number of important health education contents in the school curricula. In spite of some progress, SRH education and specific SRH services for youth are still very limited. In order to further enhance actions in this area, the use of client-oriented, provider efficient (COPE) services has been promoted by the Child and Adolescent Health Department of the MoPH. Another initiative was the training of peer educators at the Youth Information Centers ran by the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA). These are promising efforts, but still having limited coverage. It is important that the interventions in these areas receive the highest attention. In addition to the direct impact they have on promoting specific benefits for adolescents, they simultaneously reduce the demographic growth rate. It is clear that under the prevailing conditions the rapid population growth has negative consequences, hindering faster expansion of access to education and health, and making it more difficult to achieve the reduction of unemployment and poverty.

Considering that in certain circumstances the country's economic process may be unable to generate enough jobs, and that economic constraints may force adolescents to leave school in order to seek an income, the option of vocational and jobs training must be considered as integral part of adolescent and youth policies. In the same way, some credit schemes for young entrepreneurs as well as other alternatives to generate livelihoods must be explored. Legislation should be introduced and "standards also need to be implemented so that underage children are not trapped in the labour market and those who are of age to work are treated appropriately" (UNFPA, 2007.a).

As already stated, girls constitute a special focus for policies. Social and economic exclusion still affect girls in a particular manner in Afghanistan. This two-level exclusion (age and gender) reinforces girls' vulnerability and constrain their development options. Investments in girls through adolescence, extending their stay in the education system provide multiple returns: it would delay marriage and childbearing, precipitating fertility reduction and the onset of a demographic window of opportunity; more educated women are less reliant on having many children for security; it would decrease the age and power differential between spouses, thus enhancing gender equality and positively affecting women's ability to make more autonomous decisions. Such benefits also extend to the next generation, "because those who marry later and with more authority are likely to invest in their children (especially their girl children) in ways that establish a virtuous cycle of improved health and education" (Bruce and Bongaarts, 2008). Hence, adolescent policies and programmes must help girls to stay in school through adolescence; provide social and economic alternatives to early marriage and childbearing; end child marriage and support married girls, and particularly address the needs of the youngest first-time mothers.



3.5

Policies with national reach and specific features tailored to particular circumstances

Improving the knowledge base for adolescent policy decision making and strategy development must be an essential component of the implementation plans. It is already a valuable trait of the Afghanistan's ANDS vision of building a strong knowledge base, which is essential for the Government of Afghanistan to "lead programs with a national reach that provide for the unique circumstances of different provinces and districts" (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010). Attending to the circumstances of ethnic groups, provinces and districts imposes particular demands in the generation of socio-economic and demographic information (SDI). In this respect it is important to highlight the fundamental value of the large sample socio-demographic and economic surveys (SDES) being conducted, since these

surveys provide data at provincial level, which can be further disaggregated for detail analysis of different variables. The area of adolescent and youth policies share those essential features that the ANDS emphasizes for national development policies: while they must have national reach, the circumstances in the country demand that specific adaptations must be undertaken to adjust to the unique circumstances of provinces and districts for its implementation. Given the incomplete knowledge of the population situation in the country, additional large scale data collection, which would provide representative data at provincial and district level, constitute an essential task to strengthen the knowledge base for policy formulation and programme design and evaluation.

The need to strengthen the knowledge base in ways that would allow to incorporate the specificities of provincial, district and ethnicity level, is common to ANDS as well as to adolescents and youth policies. Yet, in the case of adolescents and youth, additional adaptations would be needed. On the one hand, at the present moment an imminent demographic bonus may not be envisioned at the aggregate national level. However, lower dependency ratios will soon materialize in those population segments which have registered earlier fertility declines. Within these population segments (the more educated and urban), increasing proportions of the population are starting to concentrate in the working age population groups. This will trigger a demographic dividend-type effect within those population sectors. This is a pattern that was observed in most countries which have experienced the demographic transition: changes start in some segments of the population, and gradually expand to other sectors until it become generalized to the whole population.

Under this scenario, enabling policies (such as employment creation, education and employable skills for new entrants to the labour force) could be staggered, with an earlier start targeted to those sectors. This may help to materialize some of the benefits of the transition specifically in those groups, therefore creating the conditions for further accelerating the transition within these sectors and facilitating a subsequent spread of the process to some of the less advanced sectors. Subsequent spreading of the process would be faster and in a more orderly way as the appropriate conditions for policy implementation would have been created at the time this change emerge in those relegated sectors. Advocacy and communication can speed up the spread, and these promotional activities can start immediately. Furthermore, experience on the application of adequate development policies in the early transition groups would help improve interventions, generating better results as policy application expands to other groups. This approach at the same time would prevent implementation time lags regarding the policy framework, reducing the risk that time lags in policy implementation may hinder the chances to reap full benefits from the demographic bonus at the time when changing age structures advance, spreading to all sectors of the society.

Staggered implementation strategies also have the obvious benefits of immediately moving forward in those areas and sectors where work can most easily be done because of availability of infrastructure, human resources and security. As the conditions may allow for expanding

TABLE 3 PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN GROUPS 10–24 BY PROVINCES

DATA SOURCE	AGE GROUP		
	15–24	10–24	10–19
Kabul	23.2	37.6	27.1
Bamiyan	21.2	35.9	27.2
Daykundi	20.6	36.3	28.4
Ghor	20.3	33.7	24.6
NRVA (Total country)	18.9	32.7	24.5

Source: Afghanistan-NRVA 2012–2011, Bamiyan-S DES, Daykundi-S DES, Ghor-S DES.

programme implementation to other areas, valuable experience would have been gained to quickly move forward into new areas as soon as the situation becomes ripe for new interventions. In many instances the necessary human and financial resources may not be available for large scale deployments; yet, targeted interventions may be feasible, so progress may be achieved in a gradual but steady and constant way. In the meantime, evidence-based advocacy promoting prioritization of investments on adolescent and youth can generate the funding and technical inputs that are needed at national and community levels.

SOME EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL VARIATIONS

To illustrate the variations that may be observed by sectors of the population, an analysis have been done of the percentage of population in the age group 10–24, according to the information from the socio-demographic and economic surveys conducted in Kabul, Bamiyan, Daykundi and Ghor, as well as the percentage in this group at the national level, according to the NRVA 2012–2011 survey (Table 3).

The comparative analysis of the proportions of population in the age group of adolescents and young people indicates that the process of age structural change may be at different stage in different provinces. The variations of percentages in the age group 15–24 is most interesting, because this group approximately represents the proportions of population in the cohorts of new entrants to the labour force. Considering this group of provinces, the concentration in the 15–24 group is more pronounced in Kabul, followed by Bamiyan, Daykundi and finally Ghor. These four provinces also appear to be at a more advanced stage in the age structural change

than the country as a whole,² with higher percentages of the population in the group 15–24 (all these provinces have percentages over 20 per cent, while the proportion for Afghanistan according to the NRVA survey of 2011–2012 shows 18.9 per cent in age group 15–24). These variations underline the relevance of staggered implementation strategies, which take into account the particular characteristics of specific geographic implementation areas or particular social groups.

The ranking of those percentages changes when the variations in age group 10–24 are observed: Daykundi becomes the second highest percentage ahead of Bamiyan. This change implies that as the group 10–14 is incorporated together with 15–24 Daykundi adds a larger cohort than Bamiyan does. The relative larger percentage in group 10–14 in Daykundi may be due to an earlier start of fertility decline in Bamiyan than in Daykundi, which would be consistent with the previous assessment, when we concluded that the ranking observed in the percentages of population in group 15–24 may be associated with the stage of the transition.

The situation with respect to group 10–19 is more complex, as different factors may have an impact. For example, the relative high weight of the group 20–24 in Kabul caused that as this group is removed when considering the percentage of population in ages 10–19, Kabul moves from the highest percentage ranking to the third place, behind Daykundi and Bamiyan. These variations are more difficult to correlate only with fertility variations, as factors such as migration may be at play. The group 20–24 in Kabul may reflect important cohorts of migrants coming to the city for different reasons including employment seeking migration or security factors. In any case, the heterogeneity of those patterns by provinces emphasizes the need to tailor the necessary policy interventions to the specificities of each context where these policies would need to be applied. ▣

² Since the indicators are obtained from different data sources, the conclusions would be valid under the assumption that all data sources, which are based on sampling, are representative of their respective populations. This means that they would not be affected by errors which may introduce some biases in these comparisons.



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Conclusions and recommendations



The demographic situation in Afghanistan is still characterized by a regime of very high fertility, relative high mortality, and a high population growth rate. The incomplete knowledge of the demographic process in the country makes it difficult to establish the precise level and trends of the demographic indicators. Imprecision in the path of the fertility transition translates on inadequate basis to delineate the most probable scenario for an eventual demographic bonus in Afghanistan and its timing. One could assume that the country still may be some decades away from the threshold of imminent changes in the population age structure, which would create the conditions for harvesting the benefits of a demographic bonus. However, during the last decade significant changes have been taking place in the country. To the degree that these changes are advancing and spreading, the time for age structural changes may be closer than anticipated. Therefore, it is very important to carefully look at the situation in Afghanistan, and assess the prevailing conditions from different angles. On the one hand, changes can be occurring faster than it is assumed; on the other hand, the process leading to a demographic bonus should not be seen as a uniform phenomenon, which in order to bring relevant development benefits it must occur simultaneously across all areas and population groups in a country. On the contrary, significant groups may be already in a situation where age structural changes are relevant, with declining dependency ratios determining already a relative advanced stage within those groups. Even if this is in a limited scale, it should be considered as an opportunity to ensure that some form of demographic bonus is achieved within these contexts.

... significant groups may be already in a situation where age structural changes are relevant, with declining dependency ratios determining already a relative advanced stage within those groups

Naturally, as a matter of equity and human rights, a primary goal should be that the benefits of education, SRH, empowerment and participation are promoted for all young people, women and families, regardless of the place they reside; therefore access to these services should be universally promoted. Yet, when severe constraints delay the access to services in certain areas—be it because of lack of infrastructure, human resources or security—some sectors of the society may advance in the transition faster than other. In these situations it is possible to visualize a process where part of the population undergoes a faster transition. This would create the conditions for structural changes in a given segment of the society at an earlier time than in other segments. Under such situation, it is feasible to advance policies that aim to materialize the benefits of the transition in the more advanced sectors, while efforts to expand the transition to the rest of the society persist, though within a longer time frame. Hence, following the philosophy that guides ANDS, it would be most relevant to advance “programs with a national reach that provide for the unique circumstances of different provinces and

districts” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2010); in this case the adolescent and youth policies, in addition to criteria of available infrastructure, human and financial resources, may incorporate the criteria of “taking advantage of conducive situations wherever they arise”, at the same time as additional efforts are conducted to precipitate positive change in the backward areas through advocacy, education, and disseminating the successful cases as good examples for adoption in the relegated groups.

In these regards, three synergistic processes must be taken into account and as soon as possible brought together into a consistent strategy: (i) the urbanization; (ii) the advances in gender equality that tend to reinforce fertility transition, and (iii) the clear comparative advantages of investments in young people as they generate higher returns. These aspects must be clearly articulated to mobilize support at the political level as well as from the civil society at large, a process which can be summarized as:

- While adolescent and youth policies must have a national scope, some targeted interventions should be advanced in urban areas and selected districts, which would showcase the interventions, helping to improve strategies and mobilize additional support to scale up interventions in a more effective way.
- Interventions are multisectoral, and must include education, income generation skills, sexual and reproductive health, prevention of substance abuse and risk behavior, employment and so on; hence, a close inter-sectoral coordination is required and this needs to be developed through mobilization of support and advocacy.
- There are concrete development dividends in the urbanization process, gender equality and the demographic bonus; further synergies can be promoted by bringing together interventions in these three dimensions, speeding up progress and enhancing results.
- Emphasize the contributions of investments in youth as a powerful component of poverty reduction strategies, avoiding piece meal approach to adolescent and youth policies.
- Improve policy analysis and strategy design through further in-depth studies of available survey data, which would allow more precise scenario building by establishing in a more exact manner the level and trends of demographic variables and population projections.
- Incorporate youth policy components into local government structures, which allow better tailoring of the interventions to specific local situations, while maintaining a national scope for the policy.

Incorporating population dynamics into the design of adolescents and young people policies and programmes would allow for a more precise estimate of the timing of age structural changes, improving the effectiveness of these policies. With the existing information it may not be possible to establish with adequate accuracy the onset of the changes in age structure. Yet, important changes are occurring and these may spread more broadly and much faster than expected given the fast urbanization process, improved communications and rapid social and economic changes that are taking place. In this context it is essential that a policy framework, based on the respect of human rights and freedoms is brought together to contribute to improve education, health, citizenship and social integration, relevant skills for young people to improve labour market inception, protect the girl child and adolescent girls, delay marriage and reduce fertility by notably expanding access to SRH care, education beyond the primary level, and the empowerment of women. All these initiatives, within a comprehensive approach which considers also integration with poverty reduction strategies can constitute a powerful force for development, which at the same time would trigger and benefit from a population dividend.

Efforts to these ends are matters of rights, and significantly contribute to an improved quality of life. They help to reduce teenage pregnancies and lower infant, child and maternal mortality; and they also help to lower fertility, slowing the population growth and encouraging a more sustainable development process (United Nations, 1995). ■

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