



# LIVELIHOODS IN AFGHANISTAN

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Afghanistan has endured severe and pervasive economic, environmental, and political shocks for over four decades, heavily damaging the livelihood opportunities of the population. Conflict and political instability coupled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, droughts, and economic collapse have devastated livelihoods across the country.<sup>1</sup> Farmers have suffered from pervasive conflict and insecurity,<sup>2</sup> wage laborers have been adversely impacted by closed border crossings,<sup>3</sup> business owners have either closed or dramatically scaled-down business operations,<sup>4</sup> and formal workers (including civil servants, security personnel, and teachers) are facing widespread unemployment and unpaid salaries.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a 75% decline in development aid reduced public spending by nearly 60%, leading to the collapse of essential services such as health care, crippling of the banking sector, inability to pay staff salaries, and a growing cash crisis.<sup>6</sup>

This report aims to study the livelihood conditions of Afghans using data from the 2021 *Survey of the Afghan People* (SAP), a national survey of Afghan opinions with data collected just before the national takeover by the Taliban in August of that year. This report explores Afghan perceptions of economic factors, girls' education, household conditions, agriculture, food security, and health during the last months of the Islamic Republic. We compare trends for people living in districts adjacent to borders with those living elsewhere in the country, and by employment status in Afghanistan (formal, informal, self-employed, and unemployed). Findings are presented to support evidence-based policymaking among the international community, donors, and key stakeholders. Overall, findings demonstrate that the economic and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was steadily deteriorating in the months leading to the Taliban takeover.



Photo: The Asia Foundation

## Findings:

- **The survey data highlights the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in the final few months of the Islamic Republic.** Nearly one-third of respondents reported that the physical conditions of their house had worsened, while two-fifths reported worsening access to clean drinking water over the last 12 months. Less than one-fifth of respondents reported awareness of an agricultural or irrigation project being implemented in their area during the last 12 months. Approximately half of the respondents stated that both the availability and quality of food in their diets had worsened during the previous twelve months. Additionally, two-fifths of respondents indicated that their family's health had worsened during the last 12 months.
- **The economic situation deteriorated during the final year of the Islamic Republic.** Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported that their employment opportunities worsened during the last 12 months, and approximately half of respondents reported that their financial situation worsened during the same time.
- **In the months preceding the fall of Kabul, a substantial number of Afghan girls were attending school.** Over half of the survey respondents reported that all school-aged girls in their household were attending school; respondents in Faryab, Jawzjan, Logar, Wardak, and Nangarhar most frequently reported all school-aged girls in the household were in school.
- **There are disparities in livelihood indicators between provinces.** The overall pattern of these differences is complex. Respondents in Kabul, Daykundi, and Herat reported particularly severe reductions in employment and financial opportunities over the previous 12 months, while households in Nuristan, Zabul, and Uruzgan most frequently reported that no school-aged girls were attending school. Hilmand and Kunduz were the only provinces where respondents most frequently reported that their household conditions had worsened during the past 12 months, while those in Daykundi and Nimroz most frequently reported that access to clean drinking water had deteriorated in the past 12 months. Respondents in Badghis, Logar, and Laghman were most likely to report awareness of agricultural and irrigation projects being implemented in their area. Availability and quality of basic food products appeared to be worse in Jawzjan, Daykundi, and Kabul than in other provinces. In Herat, Daykundi, Kabul, and Kandahar, the majority of respondents reported their family's health had worsened over the previous 12 months.
- **In the months preceding the Taliban takeover, people living in districts near national borders reported worsening outcomes compared to those living elsewhere in the country in the physical condition of their homes, access to water, the availability and quality of food, implementation of irrigation or agricultural projects, and health.** Overall, there was more uniformity in responses across worker groups in non-border districts.
- **In the months preceding the Taliban takeover, residents in border districts reported worsening employment opportunities and household finances in addition to reduced confidence in government law enforcement, and varying enrolment of girls in school.** There was a greater variation in responses by employment categories in these border districts. Formal workers residing in border districts appear to have protective factors; they were less likely to report worsened employment opportunities and worsened financial situations of their households in the last 12 months, lower confidence levels in government enforcement, and were more likely to report that all-school-aged girls were in school. Informal workers at border areas were facing deteriorating financial situations, health outcomes, and clean drinking water access for their households in the last 12 months.

## Policy Considerations:

- **Invest in programs that create long-term and reliable economic opportunities for all Afghans, including private sector development, entrepreneurship, and cross-border trade.** The majority of respondents across the country reported that employment opportunities have worsened over the past 12 months in all sectors. Short-term solutions such as social protection initiatives and cash-for-work initiatives targeting the most vulnerable worker populations are critical. Long-term programming should focus on building the capacity of labor markets.
- **Explore all avenues to restore education opportunities for girls.** The survey findings highlight the importance of girls' education to respondents across the country; girls' education is crucial to building workforce capacity, lifting Afghan households out of poverty, and long-term economic resilience. The international community should continue to explore all channels to restore educational opportunities for girls, particularly in light of the transition in 2021.
- **Invest in housing development and water infrastructure to improve shelter conditions and improve access to safe drinking water for Afghans across the country.** With over 10 million Afghans facing emergency shelter needs and 15 million with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs in 2022,<sup>7</sup> improving household conditions can substantially improve standards of living, livelihood opportunities, and household resilience. Substantial investment in safe and disaster-resilient drinking water projects is also of paramount importance, as droughts are projected to increase in frequency and severity.
- **Significant investment in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.** The majority of respondents reported no awareness of agricultural or irrigation projects being implemented in the last 12 months. Development partners, policymakers, and NGOs should prioritize climate resilience efforts and their links with agriculture, given that agriculture is not only a crucial source of livelihood for the majority of Afghans but also particularly susceptible to natural disasters such as droughts. Expansion and building capacity of irrigation and agriculture projects are critical to protecting Afghan livelihoods and resilience.
- **Substantially scale up humanitarian assistance to increase both the availability and quality of food.** A substantial number of survey participants reported worsening availability and quality of food in their diet. As severe food insecurity, malnutrition, and inflation of food prices have increased following the Taliban takeover in 2021, development partners and NGOs must prioritize emergency cash and food-based assistance along with support for local food production.
- **Prioritize access to timely and basic health services across Afghanistan.** Afghanistan's development partners and humanitarian agencies should continue to provide funding to NGOs that are providing essential health services in urban and remote areas of Afghanistan, specifically concerning lifesaving vaccines, access to prenatal and antenatal care, support during labor and delivery, and treatment of childhood illnesses such as diarrhea and pneumonia.
- **Future research priorities cover many fields.** There is a need for further surveys and other measures to understand the characteristics and needs of Afghan households, presenting data disaggregated by age, gender, geography, education, and socioeconomic status. Other priorities for policy research include: surveys of border-residing populations to explore key determinants of their livelihoods; exploring the determinants of girls' education to understand and explain the geographic differences in girls' school attendance; assessing historical changes and the specific determinants of access to drinking water; surveying gendered elements of livelihoods and the differential impact of the economic crisis on women; and identifying spatial variants in the vulnerability to climate-related shocks as a basis for developing effective climate resilience measures.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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In light of Afghanistan's regime change, coupled with the ramifications of a global pandemic and an already tenuous economic situation, understanding the livelihood conditions of the Afghan population is critical. In 2022, Afghanistan is facing pervasive unemployment, rising inflation, banking sector collapse, reduced agricultural outputs, and a myriad of other challenges straining the typical Afghan household including the long-term impacts of climate change.<sup>8</sup> This report assesses trends in livelihoods and services, with a particular lens on transient populations (especially at and near border areas), employment sectors, and regional variations to inform current and future policy action in Afghanistan.

This study aims to understand the following questions:

- How have livelihoods and related concerns changed between 2020 and 2021 in Afghanistan, specifically in the following areas: economic factors, girls' education, household conditions, agriculture, food security, and health?

- What are the differences in livelihood patterns across provinces in Afghanistan?
- Are the livelihoods of certain employment groups (formal, informal, self-employed, unemployed) more heavily affected than others?
- Are there differences in the livelihood conditions of those residing in border areas compared to other areas (non-border areas)?

With the humanitarian situation becoming increasingly dire, it is critical to protect Afghan livelihoods, ensure access to basic services and provide timely humanitarian assistance, especially to the most vulnerable populations. Inaction could lead to greater instability, increased displacement, and continued devastation of livelihoods.<sup>9</sup>

# 2. BACKGROUND

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The regime change in August 2021 exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis with economic sanctions levied against the Taliban government impeding the ability of NGOs and international organizations to provide much-needed assistance.<sup>10</sup> More than 500,000 workers are estimated to have lost their jobs in the third quarter of 2021, with losses expected to increase to nearly 700,000 by the second quarter of 2022. If conditions for women further deteriorate, unemployment could further rise to 900,000 workers by the second quarter of 2022.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the unemployment crisis is complicated by disruptions in key sectors such as civil administration and healthcare.<sup>12</sup>

As of mid-2022, 24 million Afghans need livelihood assistance, particularly concerning food security and agriculture. Furthermore, other shocks such as droughts and floods led to crop failures, livestock losses, the collapse of rural incomes, and increased acute food insecurity throughout 2021.<sup>13</sup>

The effects of insecurity and political instability on economic opportunities and livelihoods are especially pronounced in border areas where a significant portion of the local population makes their living from cross-border trade, both legal and illicit. Over 70% of survey respondents living in busy border crossings reported

that business activity in their respective communities depended entirely or mainly on cross-border trade. In addition, 56% indicated that their household's well-being largely depended on cross-border trade alone.<sup>14</sup> Local responses to insecurity continue to pose a key challenge for wage earners trying to make a living in border communities. Stricter border controls have affected Afghan merchants, leading to loss of income and spoiled goods.<sup>15</sup>

The trade and business sector has been adversely impacted by the economic and political crisis. One in three surveyed businesses shut down between August and November 2021, those remaining having to cope with an 82% decline in demand.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, many businesses (38%, 25%, and 35% of small, medium, and large businesses, respectively) were forced to temporarily shut down. Women have disproportionately been affected by the political and economic crises, with nearly 75% of women being laid off and 42% of women-owned businesses closing. Nationally, more than half of all businesses laid off employees, and access to imported goods has been hampered by border closures and a lack of physical cash.<sup>17</sup>

Developing and supporting initiatives to increase livelihood opportunities has been a central priority for

organizations' efforts to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that US\$2.66 billion will be needed for interventions including emergency food assistance, agricultural and livestock-based livelihoods, food/cash-for-work programs, local food production, short-term income streams, and skills building.<sup>18</sup>

Much like UNOCHA, other NGOs and international organizations aim to address the ongoing humanitarian crises. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan,

seeks to support community economies through a range of interventions.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the UN's Transnational Engagement Framework for Afghanistan has earmarked US\$208 million to alleviate poverty and support livelihood.<sup>20</sup> The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has a broader approach with planned activities such as supporting policies to keep remittances flowing, entrepreneurship and youth empowerment, and the development of cooperation and policy mechanisms for labor migration and skills mobility arrangements.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. METHODOLOGY

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Quantitative data analyses were undertaken using data from the *Survey of the Afghan People* (SAP). The *Survey of the Afghan People* is the longest-running nationwide survey of the attitudes and opinions of adult Afghans. Since 2004, over 148,100 Afghan men and women have taken the annual survey, representing more than 400 districts, city nahias (municipal districts), and towns and villages across the country.

For the 2021 SAP, data were collected from July 10 to August 2, 2021, and 18,362 participants were asked questions on issues of security, peace and reconciliation, the economy, governance, women's rights, the withdrawal, and the Taliban. Respondents were aged 18 and older, 49% male, and 51% female, representing all major and most minor ethnic groups from 33 provinces. The 34<sup>th</sup> province, Ghazni, was not included in 2021 due to insecurity at the time of fieldwork.

The survey was fielded entirely via face-to-face random selection. The 2020–2021 population estimates provided by the former National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) provided accurate estimates for urban and rural populations at the district level of Afghanistan. The Asia Foundation adds additional quality-control measures through independent, third-party monitoring of the central training, provincial trainings, and fieldwork of the interviewing teams. In total, 35% of interviews were subject to some form of back-check or quality control. To verify that fieldwork was conducted at the correct locations as specified in the sampling plan, interviewers collected GPS coordinates for most sampling points. These were compared to GPS coordinates for selected villages drawn from NSIA lists.

The final, unweighted sample consisted of 30% urban households and 70% rural households. Interviews ranged from 15 to 120 minutes, with the average paper interview taking 43 minutes, and the average tablet

interview taking 40 minutes. The complex margin of error at a 95% confidence interval with  $p=.5$  is  $\pm 1.1\%$  for the probability sample.

In addition to analyzing the 2021 SAP data, this study also conducted a literature desk review based on sources identified through the following Google search terms: Livelihood OR employment OR opportunity OR shelter AND Afghanistan. All articles within the last 12 years (2010+) were included. A grey literature search was also performed to locate relevant reports from UN agencies.

A policy review was conducted of both governmental and non-governmental (NGO) programs and initiatives addressing the livelihood crisis in Afghanistan. Policies from 2010 onwards were included. All policies were organized into a framework outlining the implementation date, stakeholders, impact, and gaps/challenges. Only policies that were: (1) within the last 6 months (2) currently active and (3) led by NGOs were ultimately included to frame our policy recommendations for addressing the livelihood crisis in Afghanistan.

Using the SAP, quantitative analyses were conducted to provide further information and to triangulate findings from the literature and policy reviews. Geospatial maps were generated to show the provincial differences in various SAP questions related to sentiments on economic factors, girls' education, household conditions, agriculture, food security, and health in Afghanistan for the 2021 *Survey*. ArcGIS Pro 2.9.2 was used to make the GIS-based choropleth maps.

Descriptive analyses were conducted, with findings disaggregated by job type and area of residence. Using World Bank classifications, districts adjoining national borders ('border districts') were identified and contrasted with other 'non-border districts'.<sup>22</sup> Job

categories were created as follows: informal (farmer, farm laborer, laborer, domestic or unskilled worker, informal sales/business), formal (government office clerical worker or executive/manager, private office clerical worker or executive/manager, school teacher, university teacher, military/police), self-employed (skilled worker/artisan, self-employed professional, small-business owner), and no income-generating

activity. The disaggregation of the sample by worker type and location of work (border and non-border districts) enables a better understanding of unique challenges faced by specific worker categories and of the impact of the economic and political crisis on labor in border areas. **Table 1** shows the sample sizes by location and by employment category.

**Table 1:** Sample sizes for analyses disaggregated by location and job category, 2021 Survey of the Afghan People

	Districts adjoining borders (Border)	All other districts (Non-border)	Nationwide
Informal	356	3,717	4,073
Formal	78	1,522	1,600
Self-employed	173	2,412	2,585
No income generating activity	665	9,302	9,967

## 4. KEY FINDINGS BY SECTOR

This section considers the survey results across the following sectors: economic conditions and employment; education, especially for girls; household conditions; agriculture; food security; and health. Each sector describes the background context and then presents significant findings from the survey.

In addition to general trends and highlights, disaggregated data according to employment type is shown where potentially of interest. Differences by region,

including specific trends in border districts, are also indicated. Across most livelihood indicators, the results show more uniformity among non-border districts than border districts, although this finding should be interpreted with caution as the sample sizes between border and non-border districts vary greatly. No major differences were observed across occupational groups, although formal and self-employed workers demonstrated better outcomes across various livelihood indicators than those in informal or no employment.

### Economic conditions and employment

#### Background:

Research carried out by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium from 2002 to 2003 found that the majority of households across all wealth levels in Afghanistan derive income from multiple streams, both farm-based and non-farm-based. By 2008, the second round of the survey identified reduced livelihood opportunities given that drought, a ban on opium poppy cultivation, and higher global food prices had lowered agricultural production and increased food insecurity. The third round conducted in 2015–16 found that the majority of households were no better off than in 2003 despite improved public services, many households having sustained multiple shocks.<sup>23</sup>

The turmoil of August 2021 further damaged economic conditions for households. International sanctions were immediately implemented, resulting in the suspension of security and development funding (totaling US\$9 billion annually) and the freezing of central bank reserves by the US treasury. Consequently, public sector salaries were cut off, the banking sector collapsed, and a liquidity crisis ensued.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the cumulative effects of an expected drought, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the political transition are estimated to lead to a 30% reduction in GDP.<sup>25</sup>

The economic crisis has directly impacted the labor market. In the third quarter of 2021, the labor force decreased by over 500,000 workers as hundreds of



thousands of security force members and public civil servants were left jobless after the change in administration. Declines in international aid have restricted payments to healthcare workers while pauses in foreign funding have stalled construction projects, a vital source of informal employment.<sup>26</sup>

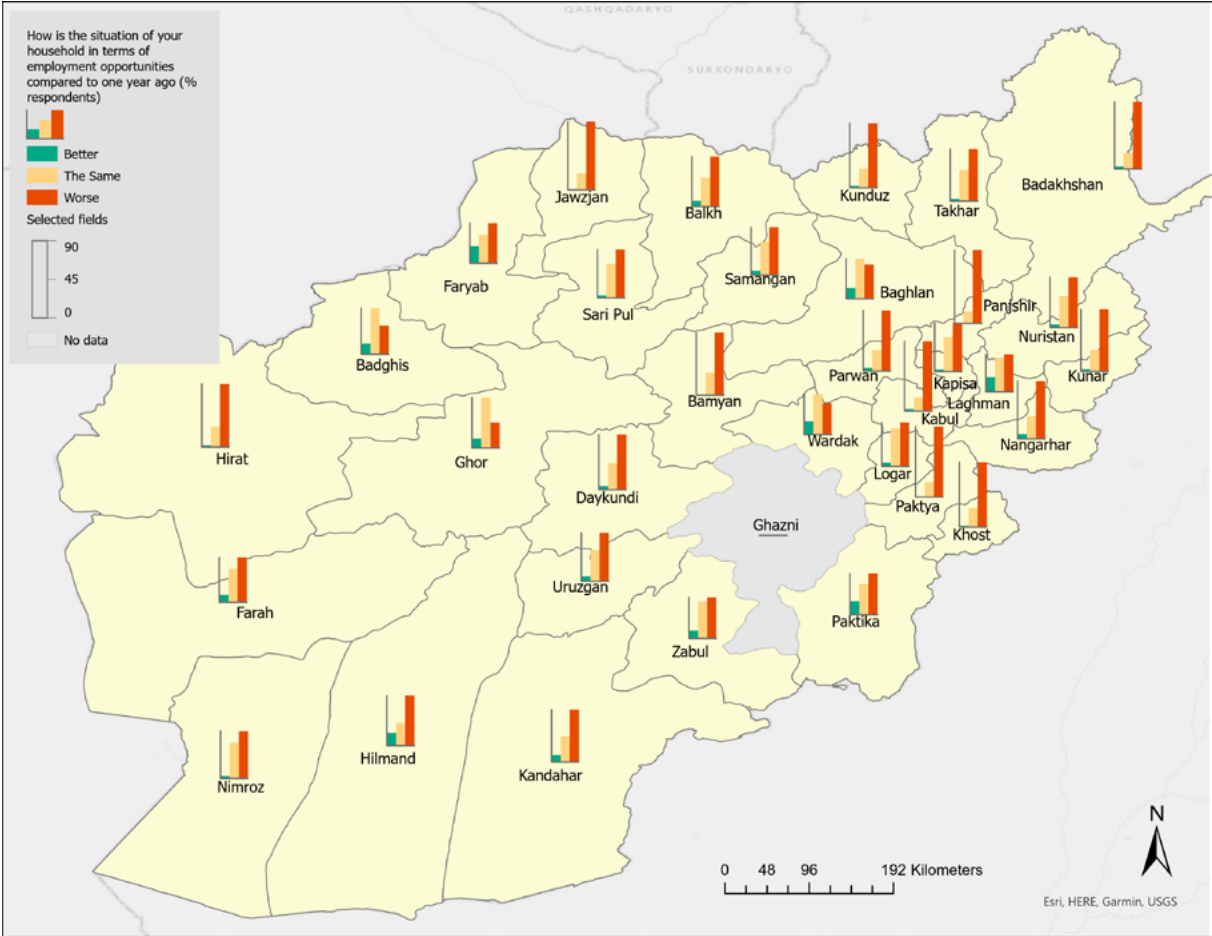
Presently, Afghan livelihoods are at risk from multiple challenges including political and economic disruption, reduced public services, and forced displacement. Natural disasters including severe droughts and floods have led to water scarcity, crop failures, livestock losses, food insecurity, and the collapse of rural incomes.<sup>27</sup> UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that over half of the Afghan population requires urgent humanitarian assistance.<sup>28</sup>

**The Survey data:**

Survey respondents were asked whether their employment opportunities had improved (‘gotten better’), remained the same, or deteriorated (‘gotten worse’) during the past 12 months. A geospatial map was then created to visualize responses by province (Figure 1). In virtually all provinces (29/33, or 88%) the top response was that employment opportunities had worsened over the previous 12 months. The cities of Kabul and Kandahar were expected to receive many people displaced from other provinces while also experiencing major job losses.<sup>29</sup>

As shown in Figure 2, all employment categories report deteriorating opportunities, with minor differences

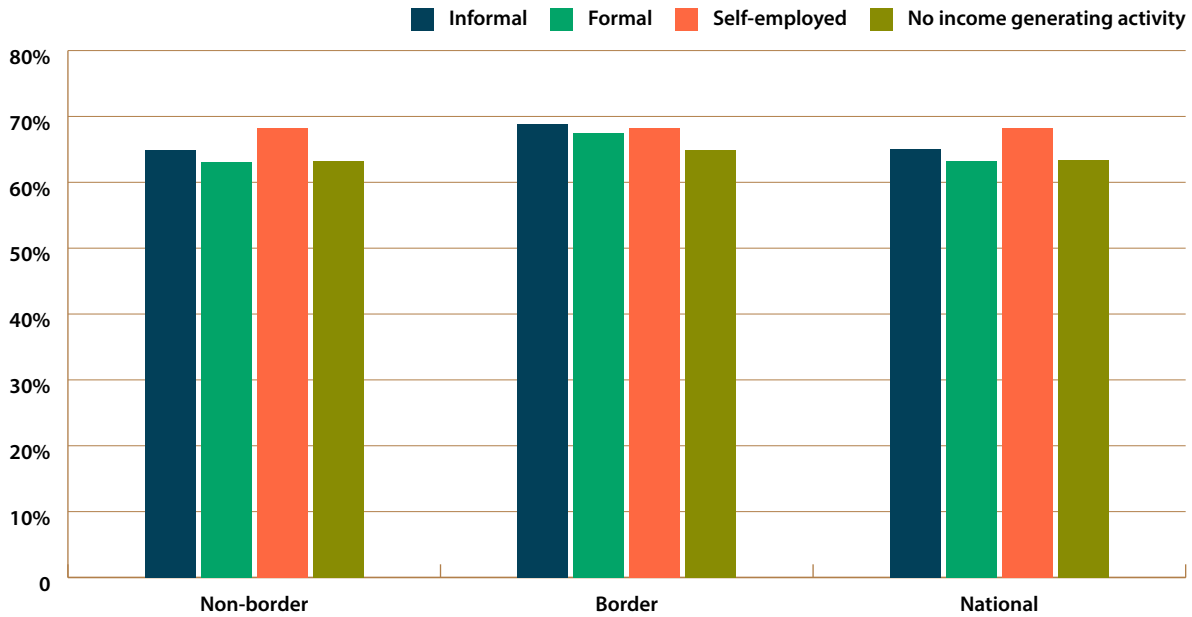
**Figure 1:** Perception of employment opportunities by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: employment opportunities.*

*\*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

**Figure 2:** Proportion reporting worsening employment opportunities, border, non-border and national, by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: employment opportunities.*

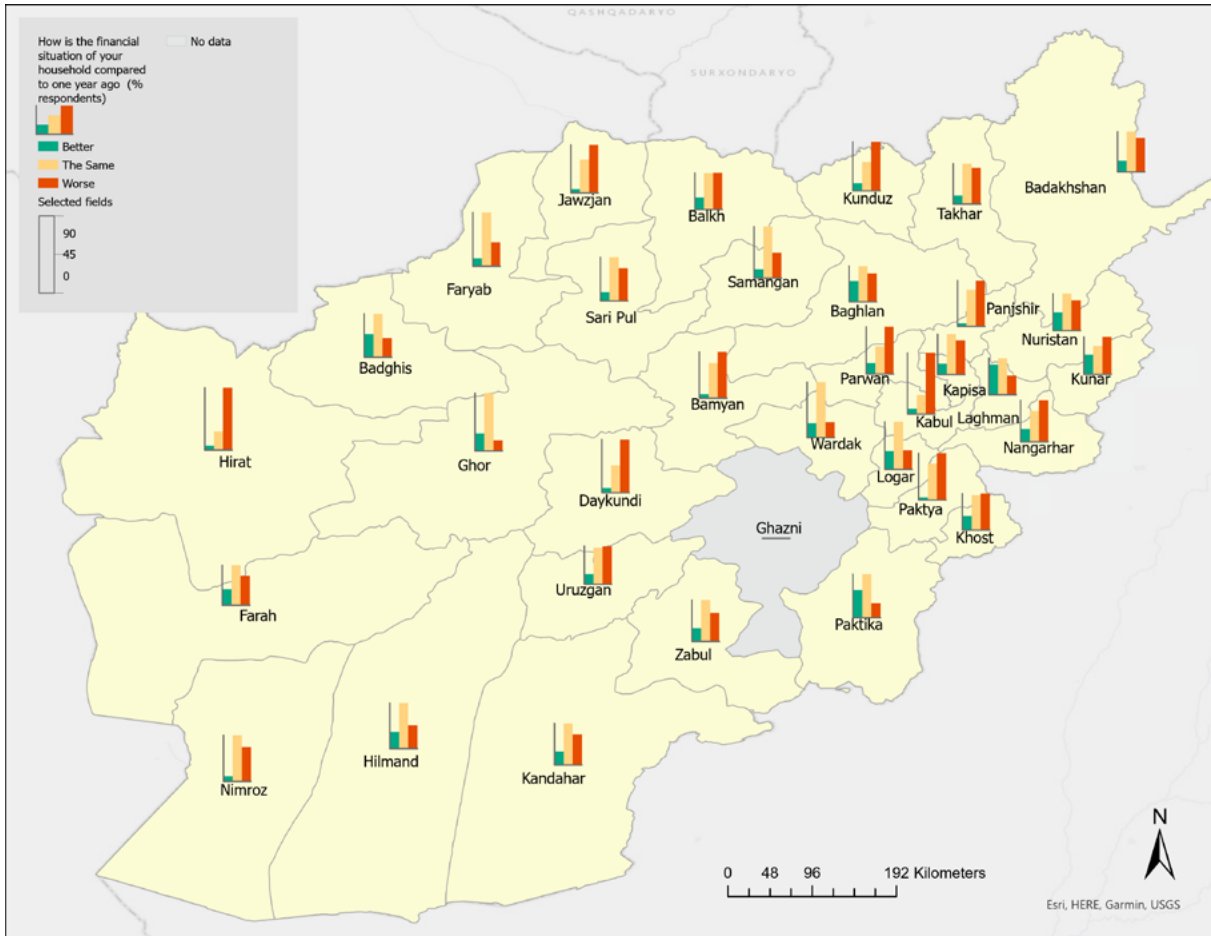
between employment categories and locations. This result is consistent with reports of widespread business closures as the Taliban gained power in 2021.<sup>30</sup> Border closures impact border district residents' livelihoods, in particular those who are informally employed. Wage laborers rely on border crossings for their economic wellbeing, in particular those at the Spin Boldak, Torkham, and Islam Qala crossings.<sup>31</sup> Many other border areas are also economically impoverished, environmentally fragile, and isolated, such as parts of the border with Tajikistan.<sup>32</sup>

Respondents were also asked about the financial situation of their households. The findings reflect deteriorating economic conditions overall. Nationally, nearly 50% of respondents reported a worsening household financial situation over the previous 12

months. In 14 out of 33 provinces, the top response was that the financial situation had become worse over this period (**Figure 3**).

At the national level, by occupation, marginally more informal workers cited worsening financial situations for their households in the last 12 months compared to their formally employed, self-employed, and unemployed counterparts (**Figure 4**). A higher proportion of informal workers living in border areas reported experiencing a worse financial situation in the last 12 months compared to those living in non-border areas. This finding is consistent with literature that points to the informal economy not only being adversely impacted by interruptions in cross-border movement but also restrictions due to the pandemic.<sup>33</sup>

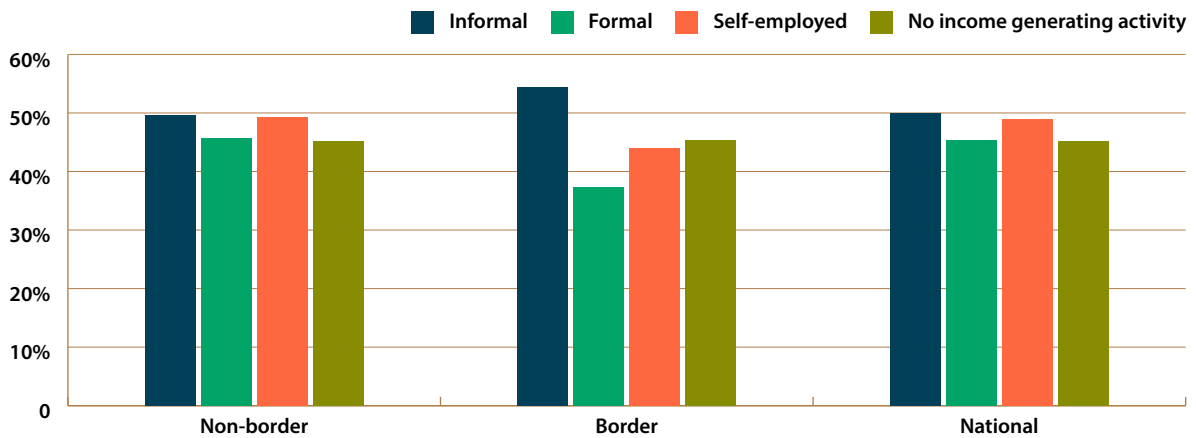
**Figure 3: Perception of financial situation by province, 2021**



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: financial situation of your household.*

*\*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

**Figure 4: Proportion reporting worse financial situation, border, non-border and national, by employment type, 2021**



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: financial situation of your household.* Reporting: worse

# Household condition and services

## Background:

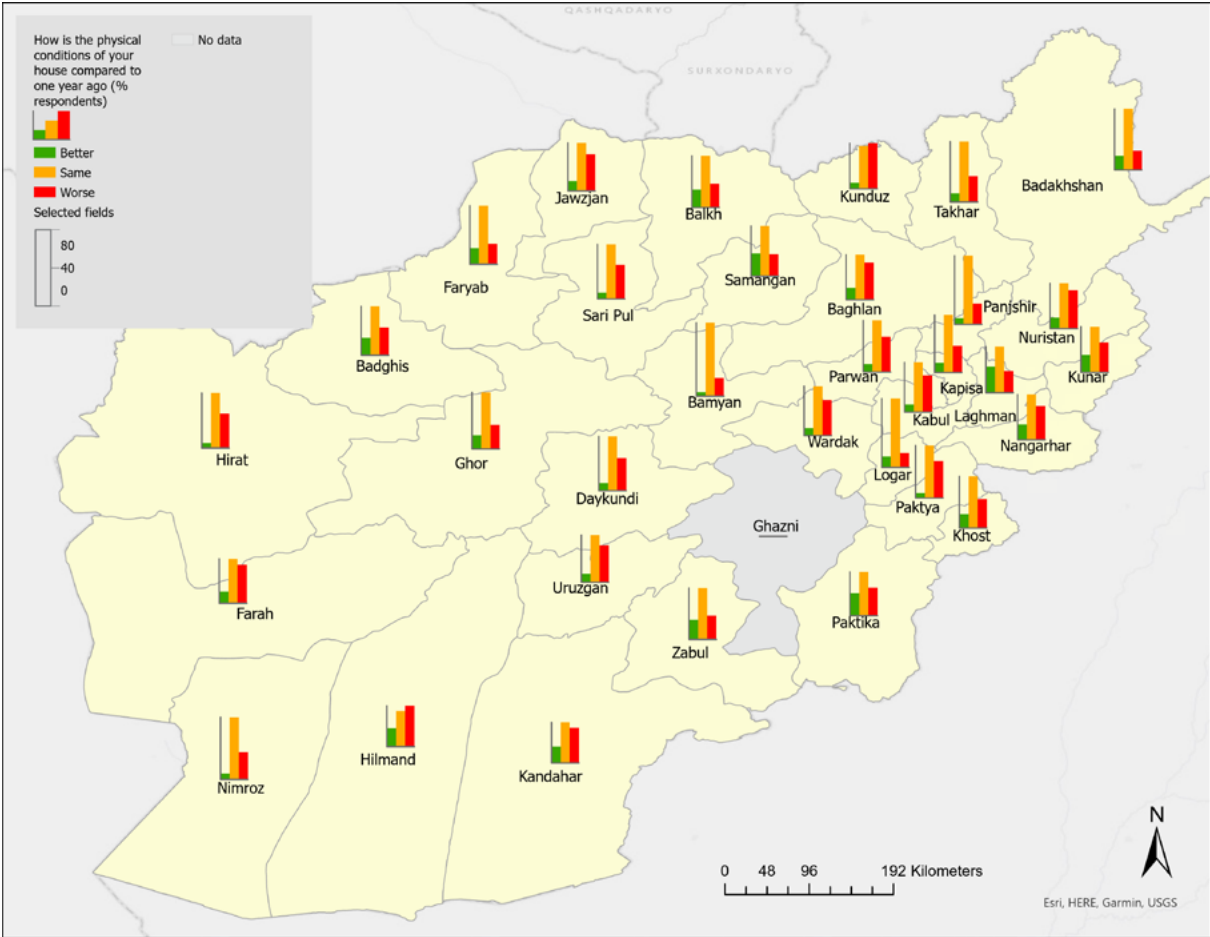
Internal displacement resulting from security risks, economic crisis, drought, and other shocks continues to rise. Throughout 2022, 500,000 more people are expected to become internally displaced.<sup>34</sup> Displacement creates a multitude of needs including emergency shelter, clean water and sanitation, and transitional housing.<sup>35</sup>

## The survey data:

The physical condition of respondents' house/dwelling and access to clean drinking water were analyzed for July and August 2021, and with reference to the preceding 12 months. Nationally, over 30% of respondents

stated that the condition of their home had worsened over the past 12 months. In 31 of 33 provinces, the top response was that respondents' physical condition of their house/dwelling had remained the same over the last 12 months. In the remaining two provinces, Hilmand and Kunduz, the top response was that its condition had worsened (**Figure 5**). The wider literature on Afghanistan confirms that conflict has led to widespread damage to dwellings, especially in Farah, Hilmand, and Kandahar where more than 20% of households endure significantly damaged shelters. The presence of explosive hazards in or close to homes as a consequence of conflict is most frequent in southern provinces including Hilmand, Logar, and Kandahar.

**Figure 5:** Perception of household conditions by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: Physical conditions of your house/dwelling.*

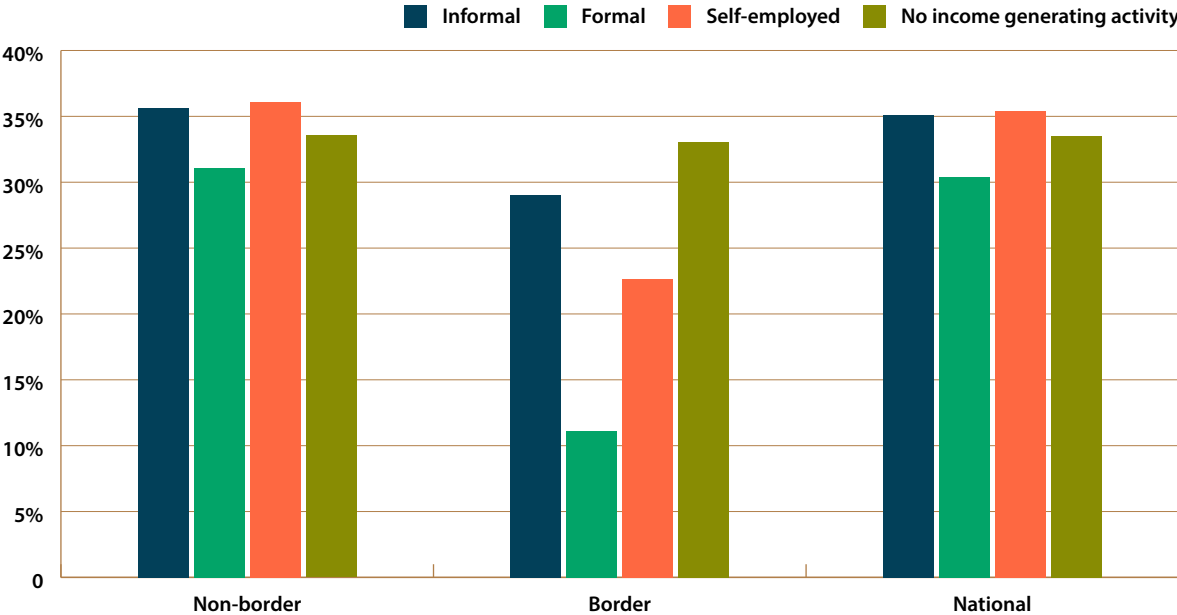
*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

In non-border areas, responses regarding the physical condition of one’s house/dwelling were generally uniform across occupational categories. Responses were more varied in border areas, where a smaller proportion of formal workers reported deteriorating house/dwelling conditions when compared to other employment types, and when compared to all employment types in non-border regions (Figure 6).

Approximately 40% of respondents stated that access to clean drinking water had worsened during the previous 12 months. In the majority (70% or 23/33) of provinces, the top response was that access to clean drinking water had remained the same over the last 12 months, while in seven provinces the top response was

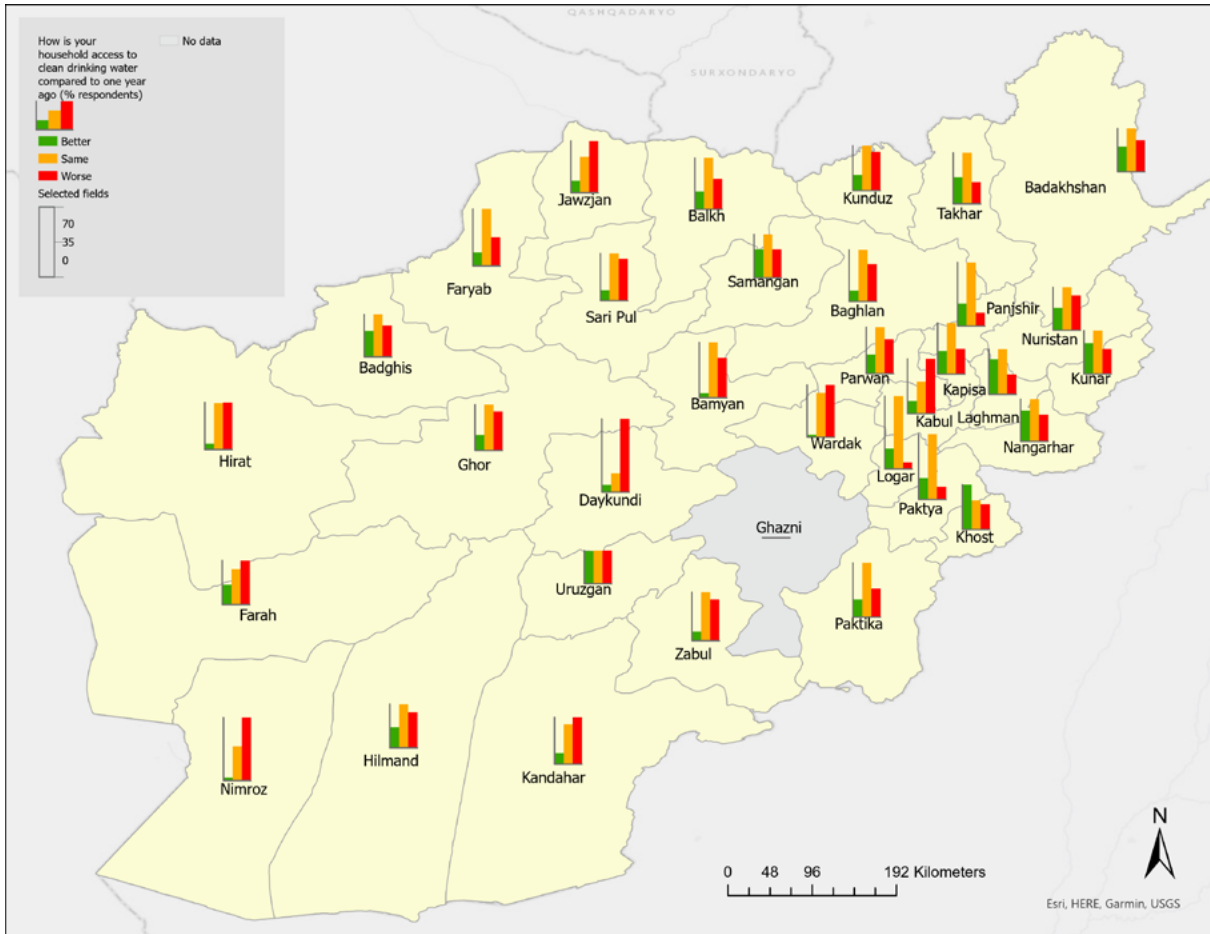
that it had worsened; deterioration was particularly marked for Daykundi and Nimroz (Figure 7). Despite the construction of a major dam in Nimroz in 2021, scarce rainfall and extreme heat limited the availability of harvested water.<sup>36</sup> Consistent with survey findings, Daykundi, Farah, and Hirat experienced severe drought in June 2021.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the construction of a dam in Nimroz has been hindered by ongoing tensions with Iran,<sup>38</sup> possibly hindering access to water in western Afghanistan. The top response among respondents in Khost was that access to clean drinking water had improved, possibly due to the construction of a water canal in early 2021.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 6: Proportion reporting worse physical condition of dwelling, border, non-border and national and by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: Physical conditions of your house/dwelling. Reporting: worse*

**Figure 7:** Perception of access to clean drinking water by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: access to clean drinking water.*

*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

## Girls' Education

### Background:

Education continues to be significantly disrupted and girls' secondary schools have remained closed since August 2021.<sup>40</sup> Border areas have confronted particular long-term challenges, especially for women who experience notable disparities in employment, education, and other economic opportunities.<sup>41</sup> Earlier research indicates that some border communities were able to rely on cross-border commuting to access education, although tighter border control (especially by Pakistan) has limited such opportunities. A study of Afghan returnees from other countries found that their education rates were exceptionally low, 78% of

women having received no schooling.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, returnees in Afghanistan report differences in labor market outcomes due to disparities in socioeconomic status such as educational attainment.<sup>43</sup>

Access to services such as education and health facilities is not homogenous and varies by region.<sup>44</sup> Despite having optimistic and resilient working attitudes, low educational and technical attainment has hindered the ability of Afghan refugees and vulnerable populations to access viable employment opportunities. Communities, and especially women, have demonstrated an evident interest in skills development and training.<sup>45</sup>

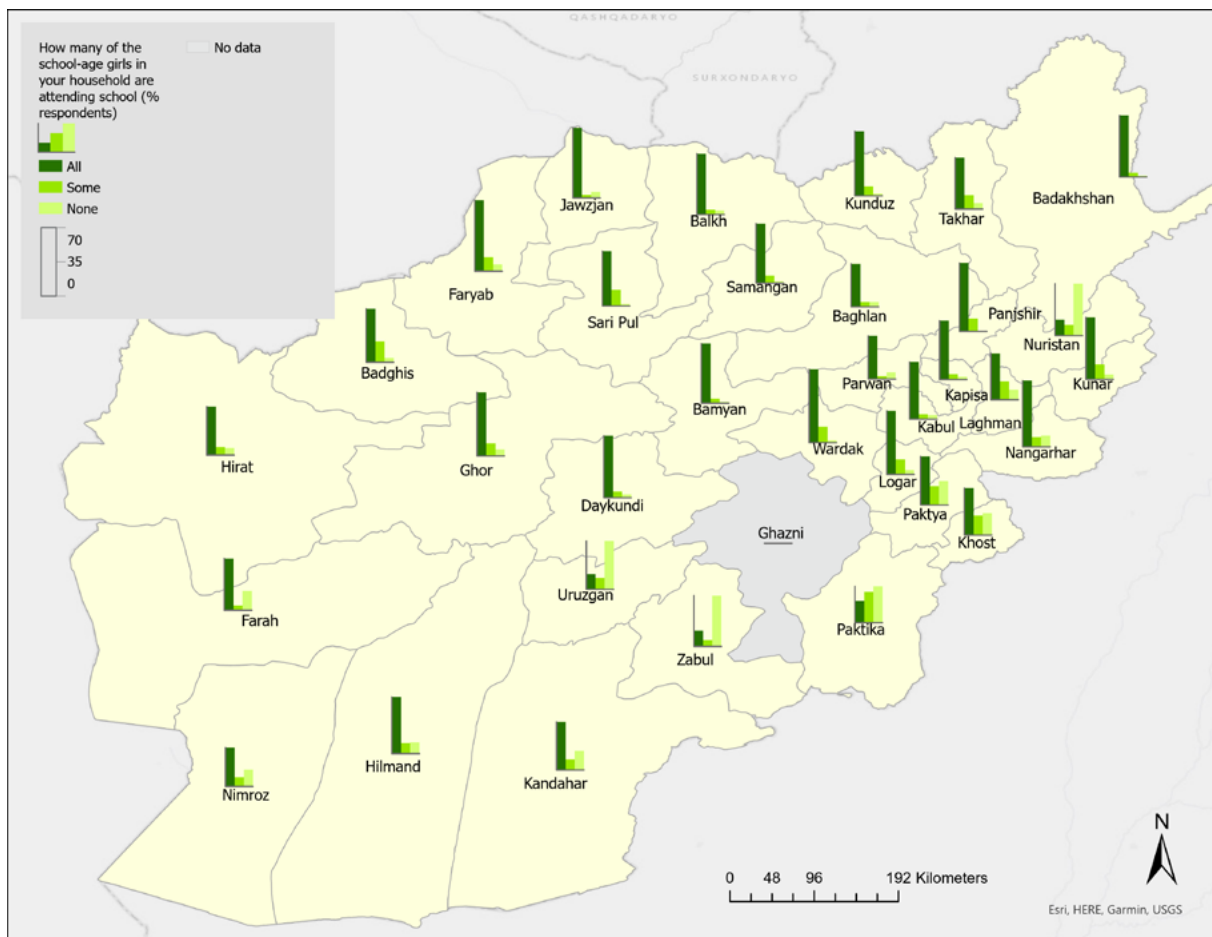
## The survey data:

Nationally, approximately 55% of households reported that all school-aged girls are attending school. As shown in **Figure 8**, the top response in most provinces (29/33) across Afghanistan was that all school-aged girls in the household attend school, while in only 4 provinces, the top response was that no school-aged girls in the household go to school. Faryab, Jawzjan, Logar, Wardak, and Nangarhar have the highest proportion of households reporting all school-aged girls attending school, while Nuristan, Zabul, and Uruzgan have the highest proportion of households reporting no school-aged girls in school. This finding is in line with literature on girls' education in southern Pashtun provinces of Afghanistan, which found that for every 10 boys who attended school in Zabul and Uruzgan,

only one girl attends.<sup>46</sup> A complex set of reasons for this trend includes Taliban influence, local agreements that control schooling, ethnoreligious customs, family practices, and security issues.<sup>47</sup>

In 2021, there were minor differences between girls' school attendance across the job categories in non-border districts. In border districts, both formal and informal workers reported all school-aged girls attending school in higher proportions than in non-border districts. This pattern was not found among families of self-employed and unemployed workers (**Figure 9**). Overall, while other sources suggest that women who reside in border areas may experience greater adversity when accessing basic services such as education, our findings do not reflect this.<sup>48</sup>

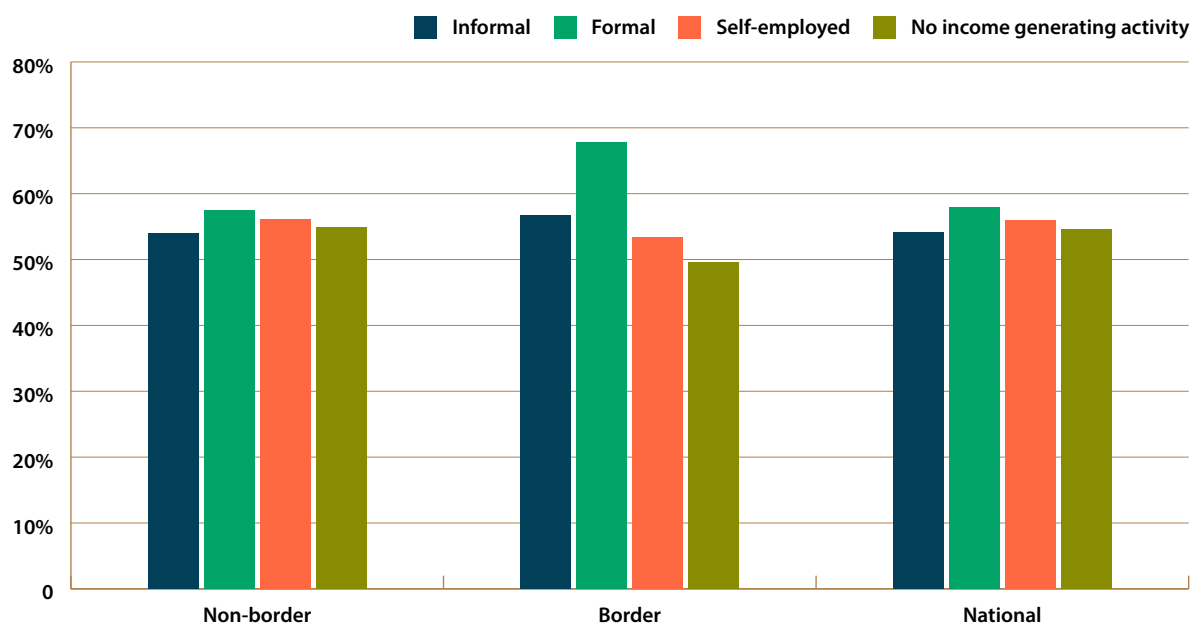
**Figure 8:** Proportion of households with girls attending school by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Of the school age girls in this household, do all of them, some of them, or none of them attend school?*

*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

**Figure 9:** Proportion of households reporting all girls attend school, border, non-border and national and by the employment status of the survey respondent, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Of the school age girls in this household, do all of them attend school?* Reporting: all

## Agriculture

### Background:

Over 60% of Afghanistan’s total labor force was at least partly dependent upon agriculture in 2017, and it accounted for 23% of GDP.<sup>49</sup> The vast majority of livelihoods in rural Afghanistan depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. Crop failures, livestock losses, and the collapse of rural incomes drove acute food insecurity throughout 2021. By 2022, 24 million Afghans needed agriculture and food security assistance.<sup>50</sup> Afghanistan has implemented major agricultural programs such as the long-running Community Livestock and Agriculture Project (CLAP) which targeted vulnerable rural households to improve agricultural productivity and build capacity. Major aid agencies such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have prioritized programs for supporting agriculture and livestock production.<sup>51</sup>

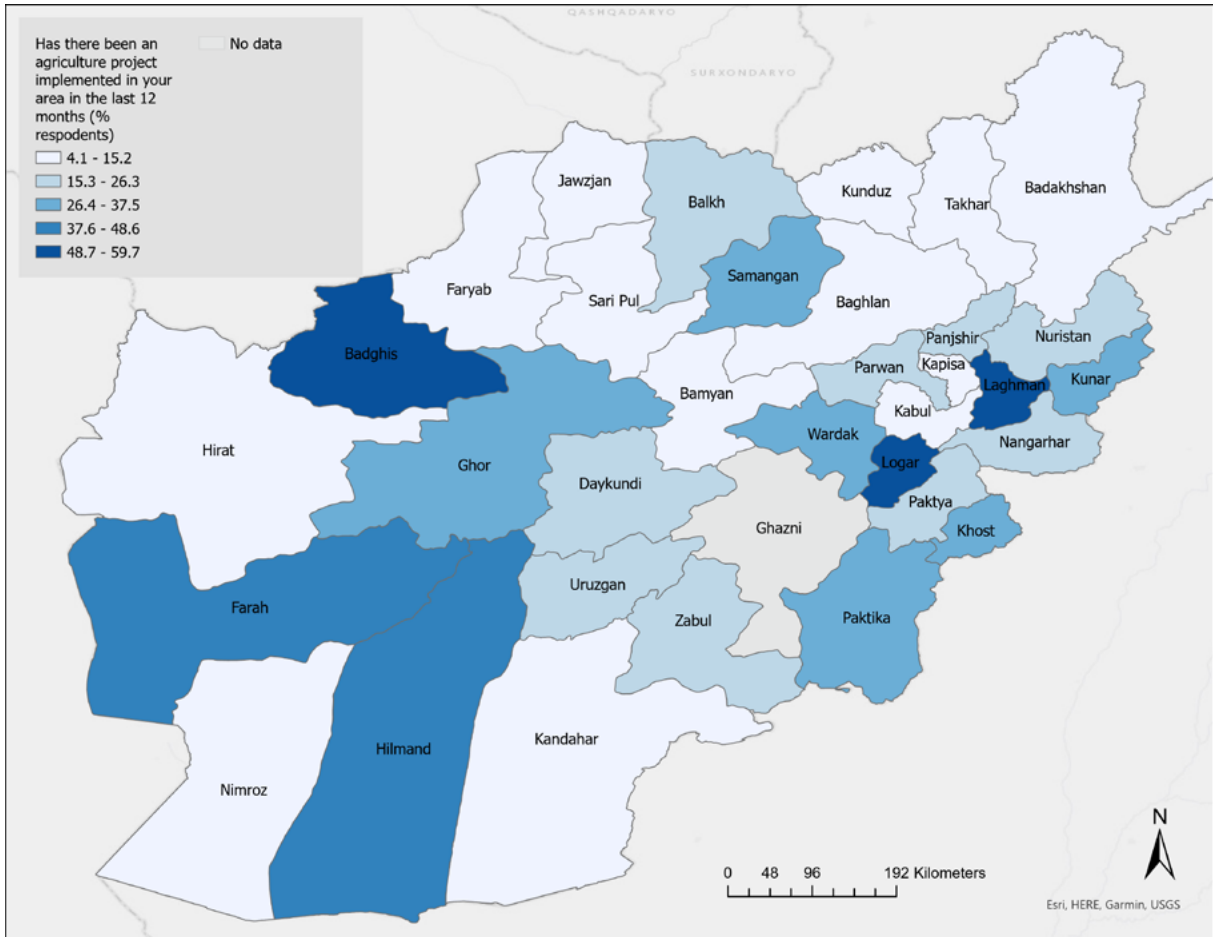
### The survey data:

Using SAP 2021 data, geospatial maps were created to show the provincial variation in awareness of agricultural and irrigation projects. Nationally, approximately 20% of respondents stated awareness of an agricultural project being implemented in their local area during the preceding 12 months. In 13 out of 33 provinces, under 15% of respondents reported awareness of an agricultural project being implemented in their area in the last 12 months, while for three provinces (Badghis, Logar, and Laghman) this figure was almost 50% or higher (**Figure 10**). The CLAP implemented livestock and agriculture projects in Logar and Laghman in 2020, possibly explaining the increased awareness of such programs there.<sup>52</sup>

Comparing border and non-border districts, we can observe that a higher proportion of the population in border areas is aware of an agricultural program being implemented in the area (apart from informal workers) (**Figure 11**).



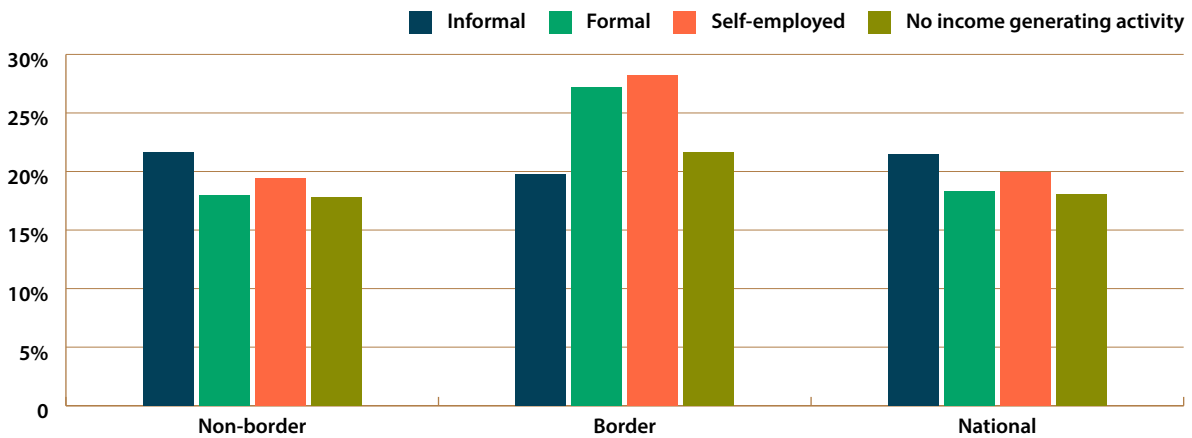
**Figure 10:** Agricultural programs reported implemented by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *I am going to read a list of projects that may or may not have been implemented in your area. Please tell me if there has been this type of project in your area in the last 12 months: programs in agriculture.*

*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

**Figure 11:** Agricultural programs reported implemented in the last year, border, non-border, and national and by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *I am going to read a list of projects that may or may not have been implemented in your area. Please tell me if there has been this type of project in your area in the last 12 months: programs in agriculture. Reporting: yes*

Nationally, around 20% of respondents reported awareness of an irrigation project being implemented in their local area over the previous 12 months. In 14 of 33 provinces, between 14% and 26% of respondents reported awareness of an irrigation project being implemented in their area in this period (Figure 12). Badghis and Laghman were the only two provinces with half or more respondents reporting awareness of irrigation projects. Hilmand and Logar also scored highly with between 38% and 49% of respondents

reporting awareness of the implementation of irrigation projects in the past 12 months.

Those residing in border districts and working in the formal sector or self-employed were more aware of recent irrigation projects than other categories of respondents (Figure 13). However, this finding does not necessarily imply that these areas are more affluent.



Photo: The Asia Foundation



# Food Security

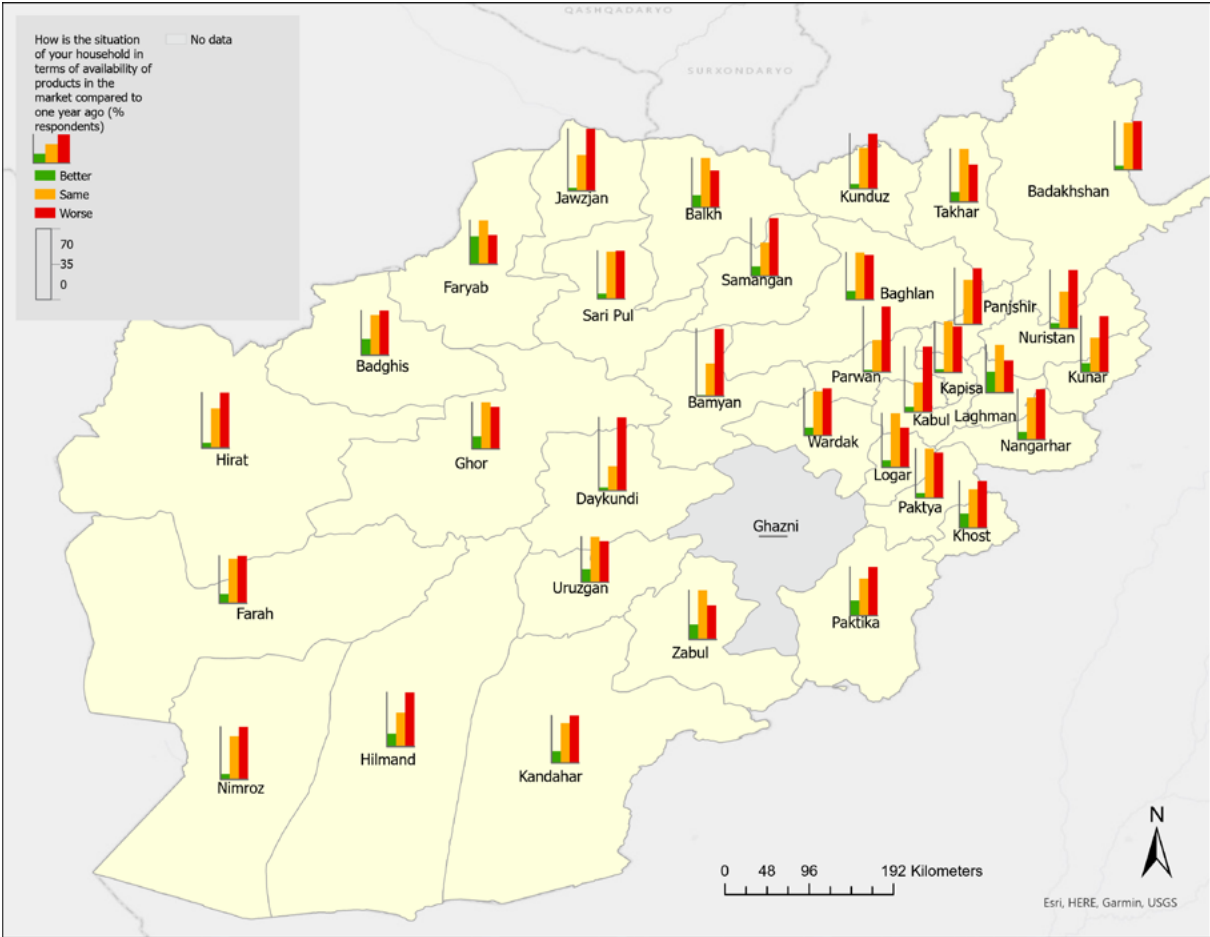
## Background:

The World Food Programme estimates that 22.8 million people in Afghanistan face acute food insecurity and 8.7 million face emergency levels of food insecurity.<sup>53</sup> The situation deteriorated over recent years; 27% of people faced acute food insecurity in 2017, rising to 55% of the population in 2021.<sup>54</sup> The 2018–19 drought impacted over two-thirds of the country, leaving 9.8 million people experiencing food crisis.<sup>55</sup> Climate change predictions for Afghanistan reveal a difficult future as increasing temperatures will dramatically impact agriculture production, water availability, and food security.<sup>56</sup>

## The survey data:

Nationally, approximately half of all respondents stated that the availability of food had worsened during the past 12 months. In two-thirds (22/33) of provinces, the top response was worsening availability of food products (**Figure 14**). The top response across the remaining provinces was that the availability of food had remained the same. The availability of basic food products appears to have worsened particularly in Jawzjan, Daykundi, Bamyan, Parwan, and Kabul. This finding is in line with a June 2020 assessment which indicated that Hirat, Kandahar, Ghor, Daykundi, Bamyan, Uruzgan, and Badakhshan had already entered food security ‘crisis phase’ and all other provinces were in the ‘stressed phase’.<sup>57</sup>

**Figure 14:** Perception of availability of food products by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the availability of products in the market (i.e., rice, wheat, oil).*

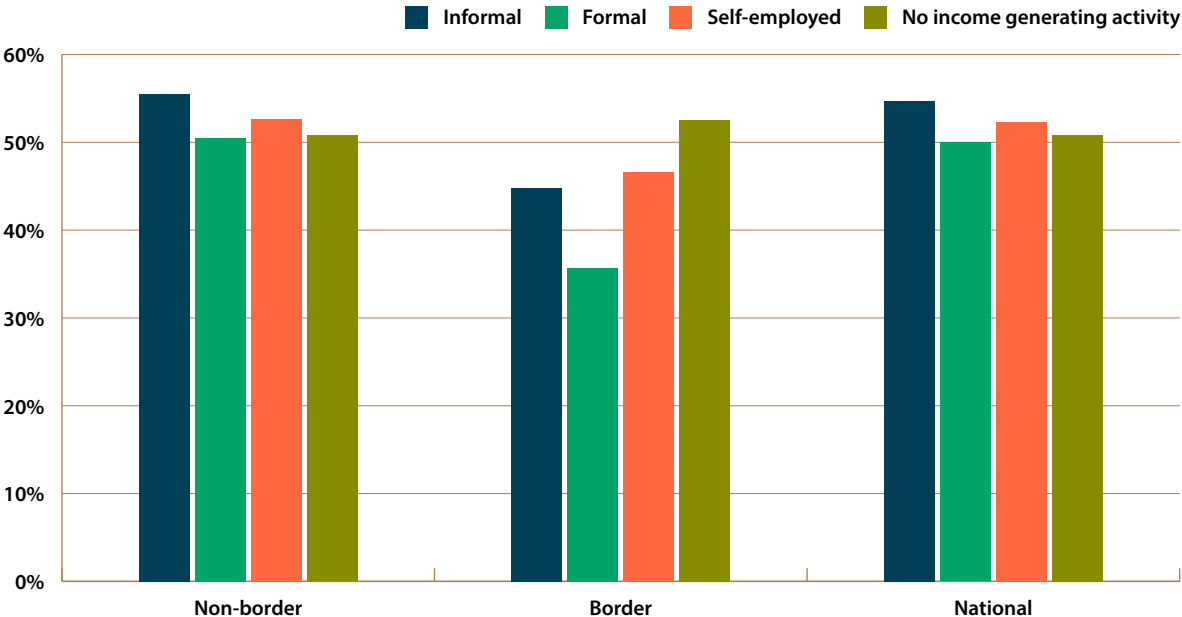
*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

In Logar and Balkh, a higher proportion of respondents reported awareness of agriculture and irrigation projects, and also most frequently reported no deterioration in food security. Among employed respondents, a smaller proportion of those living in border districts reported worsening food availability than those living in non-border districts, though these findings should be interpreted with caution (Figure 15).

Nationally, around 45% of respondents stated that the quality of food in their diet had worsened over the previous 12 months. In over half of all provinces

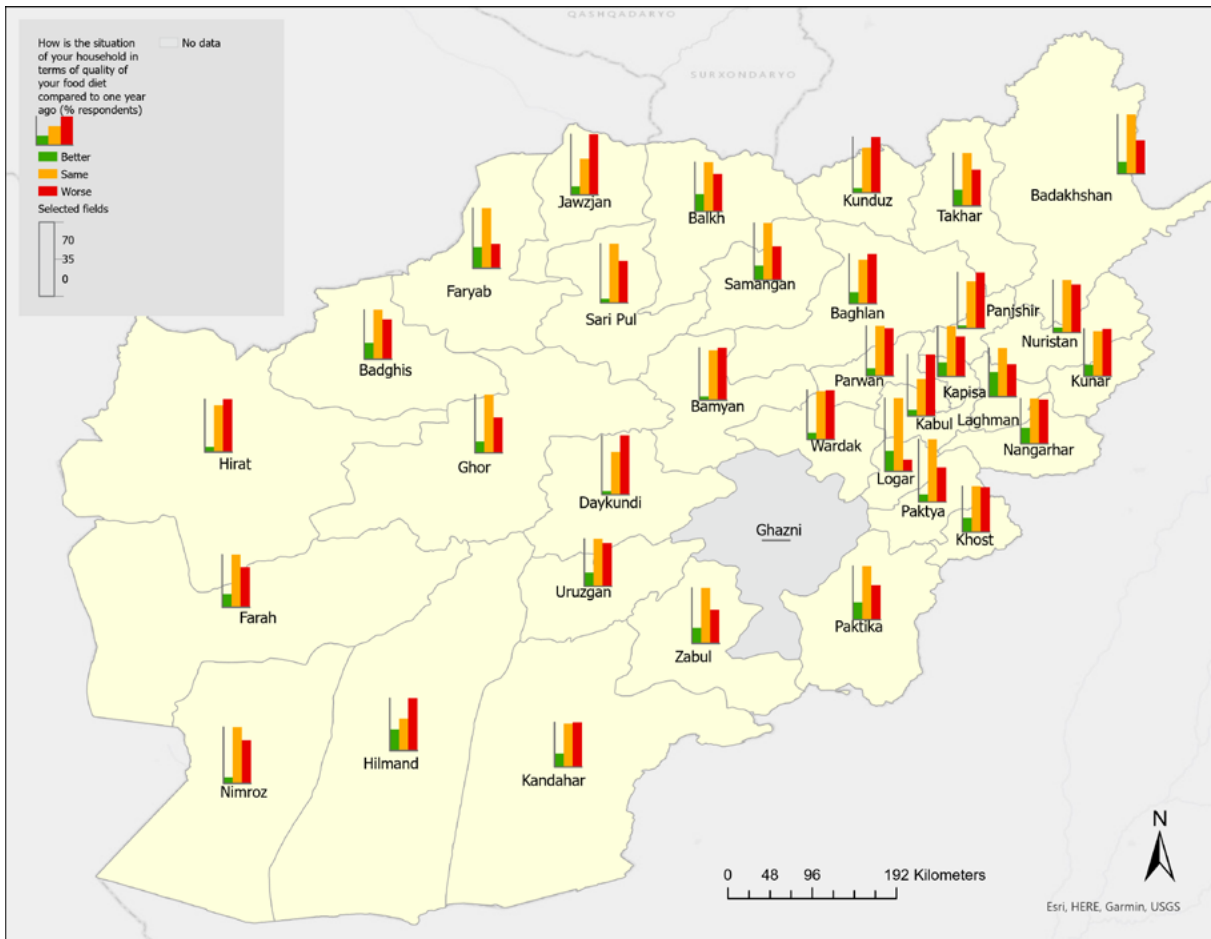
(18/33), the majority of respondents stated their quality of food was the same as 12 months ago, while in nine provinces the majority of respondents stated that food quality had deteriorated (Figure 16). In Jawzjan and Kabul in particular, food quality was notably reported to be worse than 12 months before. This may correspond to reports of severe drought in those areas.<sup>58</sup> Employed respondents living in border areas reported overall having been less affected by deteriorating food quality during the last 12 months than most other Afghans (Figure 17).

Figure 15: Proportion of respondents reporting worse availability of products in the market, border, non-border, and national and by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: availability of products in the market (i.e., rice, wheat, oil). Reporting: worse*

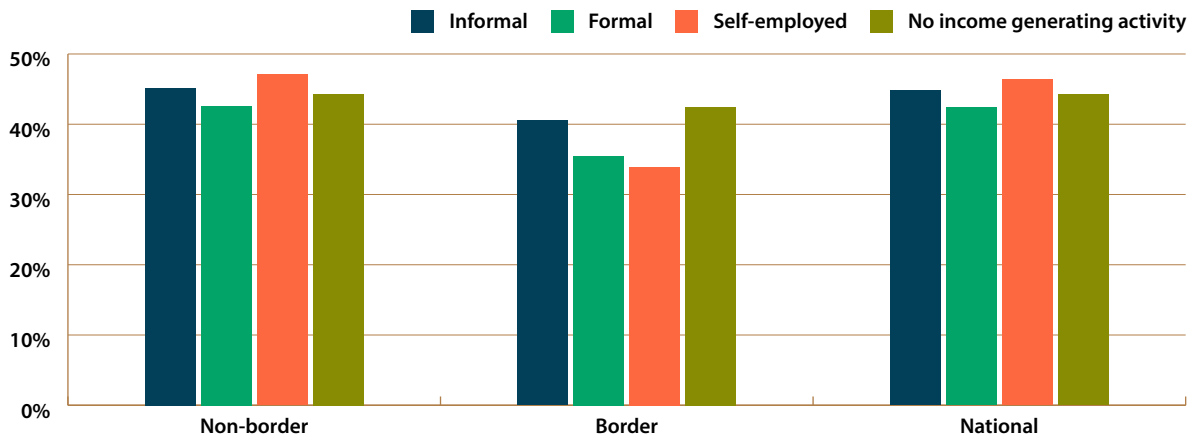
**Figure 16:** Perception of quality of food by province, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: quality of food in your diet.*

*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

**Figure 17:** Proportion of respondents reporting worse quality of food in their diet, border, non-border and national and by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: quality of food in your diet. Reporting: worse*

# Health

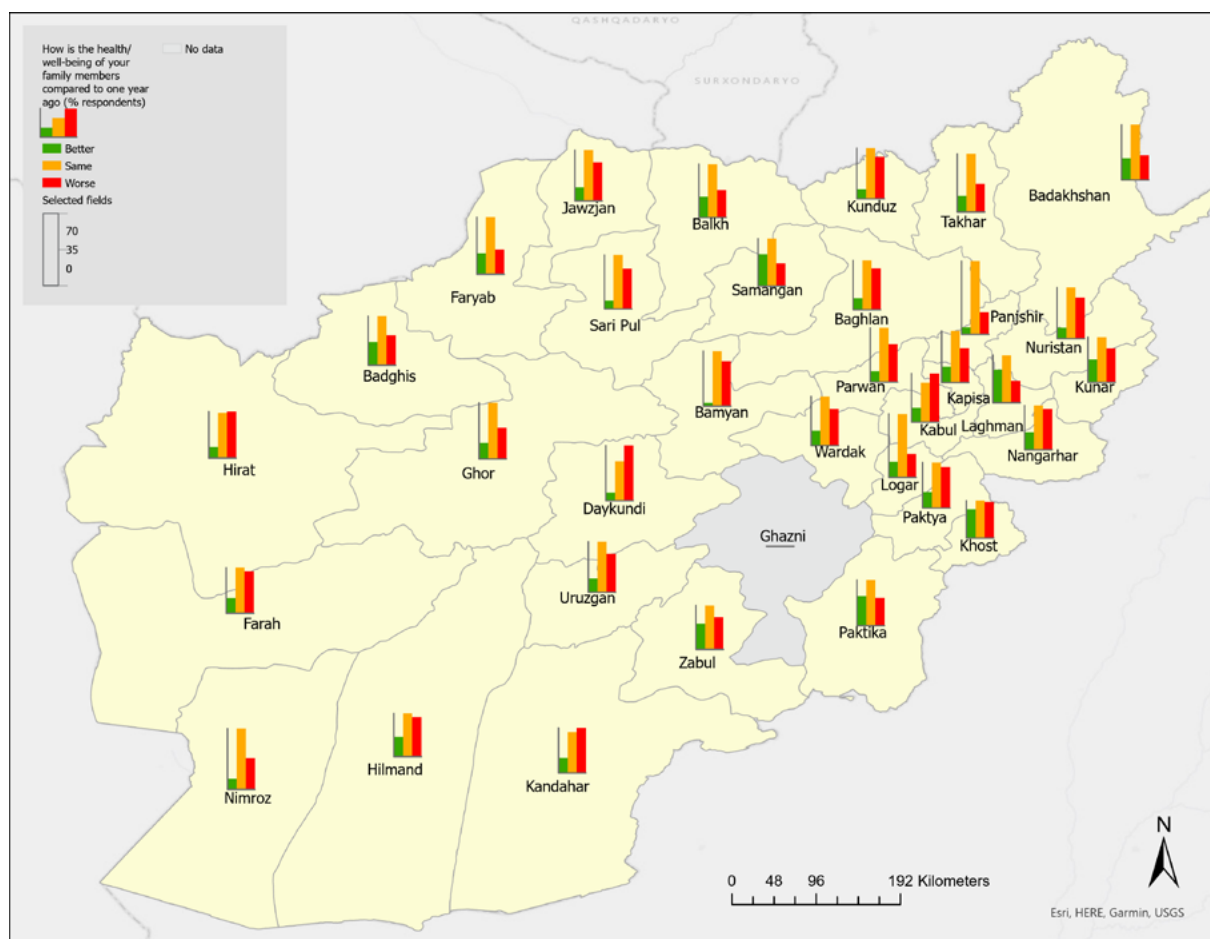
## Background:

Afghanistan’s pervasive conflict has damaged the long-term development of its public health infrastructure.<sup>59</sup> The country’s regime change has resulted in further disruptions to healthcare access for Afghans.<sup>60</sup> The medical expenses of sick household members have contributed to the economic vulnerabilities of households.<sup>61</sup> A survey of patients and caregivers in Afghanistan in February 2021 found that 40% of respondents identified healthcare costs as one of the most significant financial pressures on households.<sup>62</sup> Population growth, internal displacement, and high rates of cross-border return compound the challenges.<sup>63</sup> Sustained delays in resolving the barriers to accessing public health are likely to negatively impact vulnerable populations, including those in border areas and rural communities.<sup>64</sup>

## The survey data:

The 2021 survey asked respondents to report whether the health or well-being of family members had improved, remained the same, or worsened over the preceding 12 months. At the national level, nearly 40% of respondents reported that the health of their family members had deteriorated (**Figure 18**). A far smaller proportion of respondents reported an improvement over that period. Although a substantial proportion of respondents said that their health remained the same, the health status of Afghans was poor to begin with. As many as 14.5 million Afghans needed life-saving health services such as trauma care, vaccinations, and maternal and child health care in 2021.<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 18:** Health of family members by province, 2021



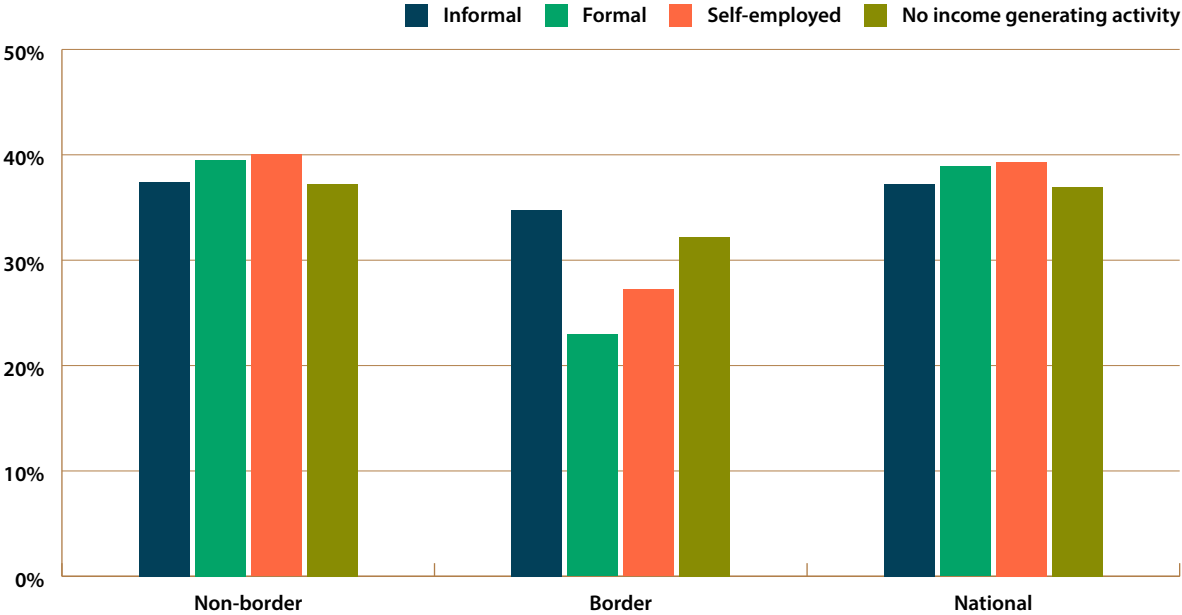
Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following: Health/well-being of your family members.*

*Data for Ghazni were not collected due to security issues.*

Survey findings show that respondents residing in non-border districts reported family members having worse health more often than those in border districts. The difference was particularly pronounced for those in the formal sector or self-employed (Figure 19). Long-standing support to border areas from development partners such as the Aga Khan Development Network and UNDP could partly explain the findings.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, some of those residing near borders can rely

on cross-border commuting for health care services, especially those in formal employment or self-employment who may have the means to do so.<sup>67</sup> Past research has found that there is significant variation in health access between regions, and individuals residing both in border areas and in rural communities across the country experience pronounced disruptions to their health and livelihood.<sup>68</sup>

Figure 19: Proportion reporting worse health of family members, border, non-border, and national and by employment type, 2021



Proportion of respondents who answered the question: *Compared to one year ago, would you say that the situation for your household has improved, remained the same or deteriorated with respect to the following: Health/well-being of your family members. Reporting: worse*



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## Further information on the Survey of the Afghan People

The longest-running barometer of Afghan opinion, the Survey of the Afghan People presents a clear picture of the gains and gaps that Afghans perceive in a rapidly transforming nation. The survey, now in its sixteenth edition, has gathered the views of more than 148,000 Afghans since 2004 on issues of security, peace and reconciliation, the economy, governance, and women's rights.

For more information about The Asia Foundation's work in Afghanistan please contact [info@asiafoundation.org](mailto:info@asiafoundation.org), [amy.ovalle@asiafoundation.org](mailto:amy.ovalle@asiafoundation.org), or [abdullah.ahmadzai@asiafoundation.org](mailto:abdullah.ahmadzai@asiafoundation.org)



This analysis and report were prepared by scientists and research associates at Modern Scientist Global ([www.modernscientistglobal.com](http://www.modernscientistglobal.com)) including Adebisi Akande, Angelika Aziz, Sahil Gambhir, Sabah Husain, Carina Luo, Ramraj Rajakumar, Hadia Rafiqzad, Hana Tasic, and Nadia Akseer Shinwari.

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