

Afghanistan



FAST FACTS¹

OFFICIAL NAME: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

CAPITAL: Kabul

POPULATION: 38.9 million²

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: Dari (Afghan Persian), Pashtu

MONEY: Afghani

NATIONALITY: *Afghan*, *pl. Afghans*.

AREA: 251,823 square miles (652,230 square kilometers)

GEOGRAPHY

Afghanistan is located in Central Asia. It is bordered by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the north, and Tajikistan and China to the northeast.

Many Afghans live in the fertile valleys between the mountains and grow their crops and tend to their animals. Only 20 percent of the land is used as fields.

¹ <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>

² [\(United Nations Population Fund, 2021\)](#)

PEOPLE & CULTURE

The country is made of many different groups. About 15 million people, nearly half of Afghanistan's population are Pashtuns and live in the south around Kandahar. They are descendants of people who came to the country 3,200 years ago.

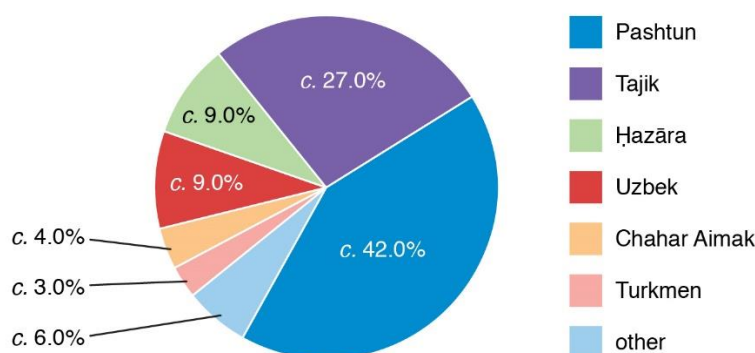
Many other groups live in the country as well—Pashtuns are related to the Persian people of Iran, the Tajiks are also Persian, but speak another language called Dari, and the Uzbeks speak a language similar to Turkish.

The Hazaras live in the mountains of central Afghanistan and are believed to be descendants of the Mongols because their Dari language contains many Mongol words.

Due to many years of war, the countryside is littered with unexploded mines and children who herd animals are often killed by stepping on mines. Many schools have been destroyed, but children, including girls, go to school in ruins or wherever possible.

Ethnic make-up³

Ethnolinguistic composition (2004)



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Previous estimates have put the population at Pashtun 42 per cent, Tajik 27 per cent, Hazara 9 per cent, Uzbek 9 per cent, Turkmen 3 per cent, Baluchi 2 per cent and other groups making up the remaining 8 per cent.

Main languages

Dari (Farsi dialect, 50 per cent of the population) Pashtu (35 per cent) [both national languages].

More than 3.5 million Afghan refugees live outside the country, mainly in Pakistan and Iran. Many Afghans in NZ were born in or grew up in Pakistan or Iran. Therefore, they are fluent in Urdu or Farsi.

Religion

Islam is the religion for 99.7% of Afghans. 88% of Afghans are Sunni and 11% are Shia.

³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan/Plant-and-animal-life>

Pashtuns are mostly Sunni with the exception of the Pashtun Turi tribe who are Shi'a. Significant numbers of the Tajik community are also Sunnis. The majority of ethnic Hazaras are Shi'a⁴.

GOVERNMENT

Until very recently, Afghanistan was considered a newly formed democracy. However, in mid-August 2021, the Taliban—a religious and political group that ruled the country from the mid-1990s until 2001—took control of the country's major cities and regained power⁵.

AFGHANS IN NEW ZEALAND

Since 1840, New Zealand has given refuge to refugees from Europe, South America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

In 2001, about 130 refugees from Afghanistan who had been on board the Norwegian freighter Tampa, were accepted for settlement in NZ, after Australia made it difficult for them to stay in that country⁶.

Among the Afghan refugees rescued by the Tampa were several teenage boys, who had made their escape without their parents or siblings. They were eventually admitted to New Zealand⁷

From July 2012 until present, the following number of Afghan nationals have been given the chance to resettle in NZ:

Category of "refugees"	Number of individuals ⁸
Refugee or Protected Persons status (approved asylum seekers)	46
Quota refugees	945
Refugee Family Support Category	731
Total	1,722

Afghan families and individuals have resettled in Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch, Ashburton and Dunedin.

A large proportion of Afghan refugees resettled in NZ are Hazara ethnicity, who are the persecuted minority, but there are also Tajik and Pashto ethnic groups in NZ.

In addition to those who came as refugees, there are also migrant Afghans across the country. At 2018 Census, the population of Afghans in NZ was 5,250⁹.

⁴ <https://minorityrights.org/country/afghanistan/>

⁵ <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>

⁶ Ann Beaglehole, 'Refugees - New Zealand as a haven', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/refugees/page-1> (accessed 27 August 2021)

Story by Ann Beaglehole, published 8 Feb 2005

⁷ Sunday Star Times, 31 May 2002

⁸ Refugee and Protection statistics - July 2021 (immigration.govt.nz)

⁹ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/afghani>

Afghan Students in NZ Schools

The following table lists number of students who identify as Afghan and are currently receiving ESOL funding¹⁰:

Region	Number of students
Greater Auckland	70
Waikato (Hamilton)	52
Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu	39
Greater Wellington	13
Canterbury	46
Otago/Southland	15
Total	235

USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>

<https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/afghanistan.htm>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan>

[AANZ – The Afghan Association of New Zealand \(afghanistan.org.nz\)](http://afghanistan.org.nz)

[Our Communities | Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)

<https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/AF>

[Refugee background students – Education in New Zealand](#)

This material has been prepared by the Ministry of Education, ESOL Migrant Refugee and International Team, as background information for schools who request it.

This material is accurate as at 2 September 2021.

¹⁰ Data source: ESOL, Refugee, Migrant International Education Team, Ministry of Education, 2 September 2021