**What is the population of Afghanistan?**

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In fragile and conflict-affected states the availability and reliability of national data can be poor. In Afghanistan, the first and only census was held in 1979, although this covered only two thirds of districts due to insecurity. Further census enumeration was planned for 2008, then rescheduled to 2011, but was eventually cancelled due to ongoing insecurity. Current national and subnational population estimates are based largely on projected population counts from a 1979 baseline, updated with information from pre-census household listing activities, where available. There is an urgent requirement for up-to-date national population data in Afghanistan, but due to the infeasibility of conducting a national census, an alternative method is required.

Supported by DFID and UNFPA, the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organisation has been conducting a “rolling census” since 2011. The Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey (SDES) is conducted in one province at a time, and includes a full household enumeration and detailed data collection for 50% of households. To date, two thirds of the Provinces have been enumerated by SDES. The resulting data have been used along with covariate datasets representing factors known to be correlated with population density (e.g. settlement areas), to predict population counts in areas which have not yet been enumerated using regression modelling. This novel approach has provided the current best estimate for the national and subnational population sizes for Afghanistan. There is scope to apply similar methods in other countries where comprehensive population enumeration activities are not possible, for example due to insecurity.

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