

Gender
Index 2024

AFGHANISTAN



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ACRONYMS

ABR	Adolescent Birth Rate
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSE	Population with completed secondary education or higher
DFA	De facto authorities
EVAW	Ending violence against women
FINACNT	Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile money-service provider
GGPI	Global Gender Parity Index
HALE	Healthy life expectancy at birth
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LE	Life expectancy at birth
LFPRCW	Labour force participation rate among prime-working-age
LG	Share of seats held in local government
MMC	Modern Methods of Contraception
NEET	Youth not in education, employment or training
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
PR	Share of seats held in parliament
PVPV	Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TMNG	Share of managerial positions held
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WEI	Women's Empowerment Index
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Afghanistan Gender Index measures the current status of women's empowerment and gender parity in Afghanistan against eight Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators. This index adopts and contextualizes the twin indices, developed by UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and consists of the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and the Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI). The current situation in Afghanistan of systematic and institutionalized gender inequality highlights the importance of ongoing and comprehensive assessments of progress (or regress) in achieving gender equality. With targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying SDGs only five years away, Afghanistan risks falling catastrophically far behind global efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

This report uses the twin indices to capture the context in Afghanistan, covering five dimensions of Afghan women's status in society: life and good health; education, skill-building and knowledge; labour and financial inclusion; participation in decision-making; and freedom from violence. Across these dimensions are 11 indicators, eight of which are SDG indicators.

In 2024, Afghanistan's score was 0.173 on the WEI and 0.237 on the GGPI (see Annex I for a breakdown of the calculations). The WEI and GGPI indicators, and their corresponding scores, are adapted to the Afghanistan context. Against the 2023 global scores, Afghanistan's Gender Index 2024 score would situate it second to last (among the 114 countries in 2023 with complete data, with Yemen in the last position).

These figures mean that, according to the WEI, Afghan women, on average, reach only 17.3 per cent of their full potential to exercise their rights and freedoms. The GGPI score shows that Afghan women have 23.7 per cent of what Afghan men achieve across the human dimensions measured. In other words: the gender gap in Afghanistan is 76.3 per cent.

Prior to August 2021, Afghanistan already scored extremely low on global gender equality indices, yet, as is noted across various indicators, this score is worsening as women and girls are excluded from formal education beyond grade six and from the economic sphere.

Data collection was undertaken between 25 February and 18 March 2024, reaching 2,155 individuals (1,066 women and 1,089 men) through door-to-door surveys in eight provinces representing the eight regions of Afghanistan. Six indicators were updated

through primary data collection. Data collection was not conducted for five indicators due to sensitivity concerns; these instead reflect the latest data available for relevant SDG indicators.

Since March 2024, the de facto authorities (DFA) have further introduced decrees that will directly impact the five dimensions measured in this report and their corresponding SDG indicators. Some of these newer developments, such as the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (made public in August 2024) and the ban on women attending medical institutes (December 2024), will have a major impact on the status of women and gender equality more broadly in the country.

This report enables comparisons of the situation of women and girls over time. Afghanistan's scores across these development indicators are unfortunately predicted to continuously spiral downward until the women's rights crisis is addressed, demonstrating how equality between women and men is a critical element of a nation's development.

Key findings

Life and good health: Increasing obstacles to Afghan women's quality of life and access to healthcare foretell the likely widening gender gap in **healthy life expectancy**. Systemic and social barriers degrade women's health, including inadequate infrastructure, bans on training new women health workers and gender-based discrimination in services. This contributes to a slender gender gap in healthy life expectancy (SDG 3.7) with World Health Organization (WHO) estimates for women at 84.1 per cent and men at 86.4 per cent, lower than the global average

(85.6 per cent and 88.3 per cent, respectively) and reflecting poorer health outcomes than for women in other countries. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates a **high adolescent birth rate** (SDG 3.7) of 62 for every 1,000 women aged 15-19 which, driven by child marriage and early childbearing, thrusts girls prematurely into adult roles and limits empowerment. **Low access to modern means of contraception** impedes women's ability to manage reproductive health and family planning. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), less than half (48.7 per cent) of Afghan women with a need for family planning have access to modern contraception. While outside the data collection period, the ban on women attending medical institutes will further widen the gap between men and women.

Education, skills-building and knowledge: DFA bans on education for women and girls beyond grade six have instituted a path where the overall **secondary school completion rate** for the female population above the age of 18 years (related to SDG 4.4) will drop to zero. The systemic nature of the education ban is illustrated in the rate of **women currently not in education, employment or training** (SDG 8.6), which according to 2024 UN Women data is almost four times higher than the rate for men (78 per cent compared to 20 per cent, respectively). These findings highlight a gender gap in education and livelihoods that is expected to widen as women are increasingly excluded from opportunities to build skills and acquire knowledge essential to participating in the economy and assuming leadership roles. Educational barriers limit individual growth and fulfilment and perpetuate cycles of poverty and dependency.

Labour and financial inclusion: Women's **participation in the labour force** in 2024 is markedly lower than that of men (UN Women estimates 24 per cent compared to 89 per cent, respectively). Women who do work typically occupy lower-paid, less secure positions, often in informal sectors. DFA decrees and societal norms have limited women's employment in specific sectors (e.g., non-governmental organizations [NGOs], the United Nations and beauty salons) and restricted their access to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. This economic marginalization is reflected in measurements of economic independence and economic access. Afghan women have limited **access to financial resources**, such as bank accounts and mobile money services, which are crucial for economic autonomy and resilience. In 2024, the UN Women survey data found that only 6.8 per cent of women had a personal or joint bank account or had used a mobile money service provider, compared to 20.1 per cent of men.

Participation in decision-making: The DFA has erased women's political representation and participation at all formal levels of governance. This is seen most clearly in the score of zero on two indicators measured in the Index – the **proportion of seats held by women in local government and the proportion held in the national parliament**. The former is measured in the current context based on local governance structures, and the latter is based on positions in the central de facto Cabinet by gender. Afghanistan saw longstanding inequality between men and women in significant leadership roles, particularly in decision making and managerial positions in both the public and private sectors. According to the World Bank, already in 2020, Afghan women held only 5.9 per cent of managerial positions, a situation that has worsened due to DFA restrictions. Women's lack of representation silences their voices and denies them any opportunity to shape policies and seize opportunities to improve their lives and communities. It removes women leaders from public view, weakening societal recognition of women's political and economic power, and limiting the presence of role models for girls and other women.

Freedom from violence: The high prevalence of violence against women further underscores the urgent need for systemic action. According to WHO, Afghan women face **physical and sexual violence from intimate partners** at rates nearly three times higher than the global average; 34.7 per cent reported being subject to such violence in the preceding 12 months, compared to 13 per cent globally. Practices such as honour killings, forced and child marriages, and the exchange of women and girls in dispute resolutions (*baad*) exacerbate gender-based violence. This severely impacts their abilities to freely make decisions and live autonomously, affecting all dimensions of gender equality. A lack of legal protection and support systems and discriminatory policies institutionalized by the DFA make women's and girls' vulnerability to gender-based violence and its consequences even worse.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, a tightly interwoven patchwork of decrees, policies and practices has been enforced specifically targeting the choices, rights and bodies of Afghan women and girls. Their systematic exclusion from public and political life is negatively impacting Afghanistan's progress in realizing the globally agreed SDGs and reversing the fragile gains made on gender equality and women's empowerment between 2001 and 2021. Instead, these restrictions limit women's ability to influence decisions affecting their lives, undermining gender equality, and exacerbating poverty and instability across the country.

The Afghanistan Gender Index report has been developed to measure the status of Afghan women and girls and progress toward global women's empowerment and gender equality goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying SDGs.

As part of an effort to monitor gender equality globally, UN Women and UNDP jointly developed the twin indices, which comprise the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) in 2023. These twin indices¹ measure the extent to which women in different countries can access and exercise their rights and opportunities compared to men. This report provides findings from the first application of the global WEI and the GGPI to the national context of women's empowerment and gender parity in Afghanistan.

The twin indices, consisting of the WEI and the GGPI, gauge women's power and freedoms to make choices and pursue opportunities, incorporating a dimension on violence against women and girls, and assesses disparities between women and men on four dimensions of human development – health, education, financial inclusion and decision-making.

Before August 2021, Afghanistan already scored extremely low on global gender equality indices. The 2024 Afghanistan Gender Index shows that this trend continues and has deepened since August 2021. Against the 2023 global scores, Afghanistan's Gender Index 2024 score would situate it second to last (among the 114 countries in 2023 with complete data, with Yemen in the last position).

The Afghanistan Gender Index analyses the following key dimensions of gender equality: 1) life and good health; 2) education, skills-building and knowledge; 3) labour and financial inclusion; 4) participation in decision-making; and 5) freedom from violence. The 11 indicators measured by the twin indices, of which eight are SDG indicators, help assess these dimensions of gender equality and women's empowerment (see Indicators and Data Source, p. 15).

For the five dimensions under the twin indices, data are presented and analysed, based on either the primary collection undertaken for this report or an assessment of pre-existing data sources in the public domain. Publicly available data were used in instances where it was not possible or safe to collect under the current circumstances in Afghanistan. Additional quantitative and qualitative analysis is brought into discussion of each dimension of gender equality, providing further understanding of the status of women and girls, highlighting systemic barriers and opportunities. The report concludes by assessing the status of the twin indices in Afghanistan, shedding light on the impact of an unprecedented women's rights and gender equality crisis in the country.

1. The twin indices were developed by UN Women and UNDP. The first report published in 2023 can be found online: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/07/the-paths-to-equal-twin-indices-on-womens-empowerment-and-gender-equality>. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

Methodology and scope²

The Afghanistan Gender Index was developed using mixed methods. Six of the 11 twin indices indicators were updated through primary data collection, namely the secondary school completion rate; young women not in education, employment or training (NEET); the labour force participation rate; account ownership at a financial institution or mobile money service provider; share of seats in parliament; and share of seats in local government. Data collection and analysis was developed from primary data captured by Salma Consulting.³ The age brackets of some indicators deviate from global indicators due to limitations in collecting data from women below 18 years of age including protection and safety concerns in the current context.

Data could not be collected to update five indicators, namely: healthy life expectancy; demand for family planning satisfied through modern methods of contraception; the adolescent birth rate; share of managerial positions held by women; and ever-partnered women subject to physical and/or sexual violence. It was deemed unsafe or not possible to collect data to measure these five indicators. Instead, a desk review was undertaken to identify the latest data available for relevant SDG indicators. Measurement of each of the 11 SDG-linked indicators is supplemented by detailed analysis of progress and regression on gender equality, highlighting systemic barriers and opportunities.

Salma Consulting⁴ conducted nationwide primary data collection between 25 February and 18 March 2024, reaching 2,155 individuals (1,066 women and 1,089 men) through door-to-door surveys in eight provinces representing the eight regions of Afghanistan.⁵ Within each province, four districts were selected, one urban and three rural. Within each district, two villages were selected along with eight households in each through a random walk approach utilizing the right-hand rule. Data were collected using Open Data Kit, a mobile-based data collection platform.

The methodology involved a four-stage sample with stratification and clustering. This approach was used as an alternative to the probability proportional to size approach, which relies on well-defined population sizes at each stage of the sample selection. Without available comprehensive population data, precise probability proportional to size selection risks introducing significant bias through over- or under-representing respondent types.

The research approach used equal allocation and simple random selection at each stage. It was designed to be cost-efficient and time-effective by limiting the number of geographic area selection possibilities.

Qualitative insights were drawn from 18 focus group discussions and 32 in-depth interviews with 35 men, 76 women, 29 adolescent girls, 4 community leaders, 8 mother-in-laws, and 8 widows. These took place between 13 and 29 April 2024 in five diverse provinces.⁶ Sixteen observation sheets provided contextual depth to the statistical findings. To supplement this data collection, secondary data were sourced from existing national and international data sets, providing a comprehensive evaluation of different dimensions of gender equality.

Finally, a peer review was conducted in August 2024, inviting experts on different thematic areas to review the report. The peer review strengthened the overall report, including nuancing the analysis of the indicators under each dimension of the twin indices.

2. A more detailed methodological note can be found in Annex 3.

3. Salma Consulting is a research, monitoring and evaluation firm with over 15 years of operational and technical monitoring, evaluation and research experience in Afghanistan. For more information, see: <https://www.salmaconsulting.com>

4. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

5. The provincial breakdown of each region is: northern (Faryab, Jowzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Sar-e-Pul); north-eastern (Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan); southern (Uruzgan, Zabul, Kandahar, Nimroz, Helmand); south-eastern (Ghazni, Paktika, Paktya, Khost, Logar); eastern (Nuristan, Laghman, Kunar, Nangarhar); western (Herat, Badghis, Farah); central highlands (Ghor, Daykundi, Bamyan); and the capital (Parwan, Kapisa, Maidan Wardak, Panjshir, Kabul).

6. The provinces were Bamyan, Faryab, Helmand, Kabul and Nangarhar.

GENDER EQUALITY IN AFGHANISTAN

Since August 2021, the DFA have been ruling without a clear legal framework, having suspended the 2004 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and all laws that they deem to be “inconsistent with sharia law”. The current legal framework in Afghanistan around gender equality is a patchwork of individual decrees and policies codifying gender discrimination, including edicts, directives and statements issued by the DFA, alongside a hodgepodge of provincial-level measures and practices. Although these are inconsistently enforced, they universally restrict the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls.

The timeline of DFA efforts to systematically curtail the rights of Afghanistan’s women and girls includes (but is not limited to) the following main developments:

2021	September	Women are banned from playing sports.
		Dissolution of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and replacement with the de facto Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV).
		Women government workers are asked to stay home.
	November	Women presenters and journalists are prohibited from appearing on television without a full face covering.
	December	Women are required to be accompanied by a <i>mahram</i> (male relative) when travelling distances of over 78 kms.
2022		So-called women's rights decree introduced which articulates rights of inheritance, bans forced marriage, outlaws the practice of <i>baad</i> , among other provisions.
	March	Secondary education for girls is suspended beyond sixth grade.
	May	Women are required to observe “proper <i>hijab</i> ”, preferably by wearing a <i>burqa</i> or not leaving the home without a reason (“the first and best form of observing <i>hijab</i> ”).
	August	Women employees of the Ministry of Finance are directed to send a male relative to take their jobs de facto.
	November	Women are prohibited from entering public baths, public parks, gyms, sports clubs and amusement parks.
	December	Afghan women are banned from working for national and international NGOs.
		Girls and women are banned from university education.

2023	April	Ban on women working for NGOs extended to United Nations entities.
	May	Women doctors are banned from registering for the completion examination for specialization programmes at the de facto Ministry of Public Health.
	June	International NGOs are banned from implementing community-based education activities.
	July	Beauty salons are ordered to close within one month.
	November	De facto Ministry of Public Health banned services related to psychosocial support, women-friendly health centres or activities on social cohesion.
2024	June	Female government workers salaries are capped at a reduced 5,000 Afghanis per month (the scope of sectors and roles was unspecified).
	July	The Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice is publicized, prohibiting women from travelling in public and private transport without a <i>mahram</i> , and requiring them to conceal their voices in public, among other things.
	December	Women are banned from studying in the health sector (including nursing and midwifery), removing one of the last-remaining exemptions to the education ban and halting the training of any new nurses and midwives.

Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice

This law was approved by the DFA leader and entered into force on 9 July 2024. The Official Gazette was made public on 21 August 2024. The law contains 35 articles, some of which are new prohibitions (for example, drivers and transportation companies are prohibited from offering to drive women who are not accompanied by a mahram, women are required to conceal their voices in public, and publications and information are subject to review by de facto PVPV inspectors to ensure content is not contrary to sharia or contains images of living being). Other articles reiterate existing prohibitions and restrictions (such as the requirement for women to wear Islamic hijab outside of the home, for men to grow a beard no shorter than a fist length and bans on celebrations deemed non-Islamic). The law confers broad powers on de facto PVPV inspectors, including tasking them with ensuring its implementation and punishment of violators, as well as the power to implement a broad range of discretionary powers, including imprisonment for up to three days.

MEASURING GENDER EQUALITY IN AFGHANISTAN

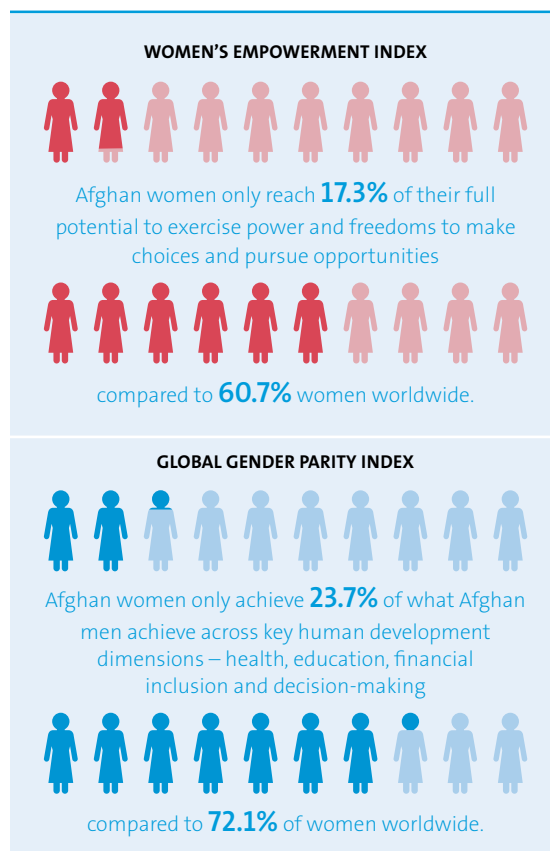
Afghanistan is experiencing a dramatic decline in the enabling conditions required to make progress on women's empowerment and gender parity. Severe challenges and systemic barriers curtail women's rights and freedoms, leading to a widening gender gap and an overall deterioration in conditions for women.

As part of an effort to monitor gender equality globally, UN Women and UNDP jointly developed the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) in 2023. These twin indices measure the extent to which women in different countries can access and exercise their rights and opportunities compared to men.⁷ The indices aim to guide national and international policy action, research and advocacy on the empowerment of all women and girls and gender equality.

Before August 2021, Afghanistan already scored extremely low on global gender equality indices.⁸ This report measuring Afghanistan's progress provides a critical benchmark to guide efforts towards global SDG targets on gender equality.

The report presents findings from the first application of these twin indices in Afghanistan. It reveals the multilayered inequalities that Afghan women experience. The data generated offer a baseline to identify progress and setbacks on gender equality, providing a resource to guide policymakers and fuel advocacy.

Over time, reliable longitudinal data will be indispensable for understanding trends, crafting responsive interventions and holding governing bodies – whether legitimate or de facto – accountable for their actions towards women and girls. Sustained monitoring would help to keep gender equality issues at the forefront of the global agenda and prevent further erosion of the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls. It can be used to measure any future progress in the country in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment.



7. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

8. In 2022, with some indicator scores pre-Taliban takeover in August 2021 remaining, Afghanistan scored 0.665 on the [UNDP Gender Inequality Index](#), placing it 162/166; and 0.622 on the [UNDP Gender Development Index](#), placing it 182/182. In 2023, Afghanistan scored 0.286 on the [Georgetown Women, Peace and Security Index](#), placing it 177/177.

Afghanistan's score in the twin indices

The Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) assesses women's power and freedoms to make choices and pursue opportunities, incorporating a dimension on violence against women and girls. In 2024, according to UN Women's calculation, Afghanistan scored 0.173, indicating that Afghan women, on average, reach just 17.3 per cent of their full potential to exercise these powers and freedoms.

The deficit in Afghan women's empowerment stands at a soaring 82.7 per cent. The global average WEI score, in comparison, indicates that, on average, women worldwide achieve 60.7 per cent of their full potential.

The Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) assesses disparities between women and men on four dimensions of human development – health, education, financial inclusion and decision-making. In 2024, Afghanistan scored 0.237, indicating that Afghan women only achieve 23.7 per cent of what Afghan men achieve across key human development dimensions, meaning that the gender gap in Afghanistan is 76.3 per cent. Conversely, on average, women worldwide achieve 72.1 per cent of what men achieve across these same dimensions.

Afghanistan's score situates it among the lowest-scoring countries globally on almost every dimension measured by the twin indices. Due to the Taliban's systematic and institutional assault on human rights, particularly women's rights, the country's score had not been measured since the takeover yet the situation under each indicator has likely grown worse under DFA rule. Despite some limitations to compiling updated scores for all indicators due to the lack of gender data, comparative measurement and analysis offer at least some critical insights into the plight of Afghan women.

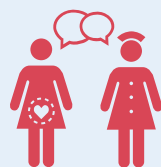
The unprecedented hostility of the DFA to gender equality means that some indicators register as zero, including indicators on the representation of women in parliament (proxied by the de facto Cabinet by gender) and local government. This points to alarmingly regressive trends. Dimensions of the indices relating to gender-based violence, the prevalence of modern contraception and the adolescent birth rate could not be updated due to cultural sensitivities and DFA restrictions on data collection. Existing data (from 2018 to 2024) measuring these indicators were supplemented by analysis from data collected in 2024 by UN Women. Labour, financial inclusion and education, and skill-building and knowledge were measured through an adapted methodology that painted a bleak picture, suggesting the situation will continue to deteriorate unless restrictions are lifted.

Challenges and opportunities for gender research in Afghanistan

The adaptation of the WEI and GGPI to Afghanistan involved contextualizing global SDG indicators to reflect the unique challenges faced by Afghan women. Researching and monitoring the status of women and gender equality in Afghanistan is particularly difficult amid restrictions impacting every sphere of women's lives. Further complexity comes from ongoing political instability and safety concerns. Data collection required significant sensitivity and flexibility. The difficulty of conducting reliable data collection limits a full assessment of the impact of DFA policies on women and girls. Where data are available, however, they show a stark regression on gender equality.

VISUALIZING THE TWIN INDICES AND INDICATORS*

This graph visualizes each outcome indicator under the WEI and GPPI and how the indices are interrelated. While some indicators overlap (purple), there are complementarities in the dimension for life and good health and freedom of violence.



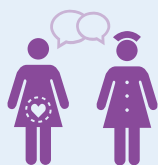
Life and good health

Women of reproductive age whose need for family planning is satisfied with modern methods (percentage aged 15-49) [MMC] **SDG 3.7.1**



Freedom from violence

Ever-partnered women and girls subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months (percentage aged 15-49) [IPV] **SDG 5.2.1**



Life and good health

Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women percentage aged 15-49) [ABR] **SDG 3.7.2**



Education, skill-building, and knowledge

Population with completed secondary education or higher (percentage aged 18 and older, by sex) [CSE] **SDG 4.1.2**

Youth not in education, employment or training (percentage aged 18-29) [NEET] **SDG 8.6.1**



Labour and financial inclusion

Labour force participation rate among prime-working-age individuals who are living in a household comprising a couple and at least one child under age 6 (percentage aged 18-59, by sex) [LFPRCW] **related to SDG 5.4**

Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider (percentage of population aged 18 and older, by sex) [FINACNT] **SDG 8.10.2**

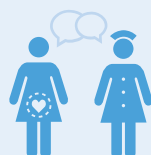


Participation in decision-making

Share of seats held in parliament (percentage, by sex) [PR] **SDG 5.5.1**

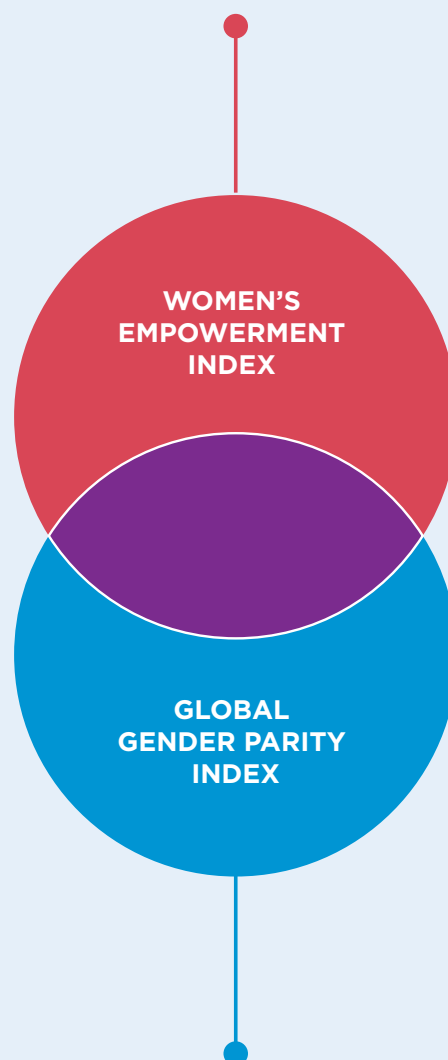
Shares of seats held in local government (percentage, by sex) [LG] **SDG 5.5.1**

Shares of managerial positions held (percentage, by sex) [TMNG] **SDG 5.5.2**



Life and good health

Fraction of life expectancy at birth spent in good health (percentage, by sex) [HALE/LE] **related to SDG 3.7**



*Please refer to Annex 1 & 3 for an overview of the methodology.

INDICATORS AND DATA SOURCE

DIMENSION	INDICATORS	SDG INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INDEX	GLOBAL GENDER PARITY INDEX	
						FEMALE	MALE
OVERALL SCORE					0.173	0.237	
LIFE AND GOOD HEALTH	Fraction of life expectancy at birth spent in good health (percentage, by sex [HALE/LE])	related to 3.7	WHO 2024. The Global Health Observatory. ⁹	2021		84.1	86.4
	Women of reproductive age whose need for family planning is satisfied with modern methods (percentage aged 15–49) [MMC]	3.7.1	UNDESA Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2022. ¹⁰	2024	48.7		
	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15–19) [ABR]	3.7.2	UNFPA 2024. UNFPA Afghanistan Data Overview. ¹¹	2024	62.0		
EDUCATION, SKILL-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE	Population with completed secondary education or higher (percentage aged 18 and older), by sex [CSE]*	4.1.2	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	11.8	11.8	28.9^
	Youth not in education, employment or training (percentage aged 18–29), by sex [NEET]*	8.6.1	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	77.6	77.6	20.2
LABOUR AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION	Labour force participation rate among prime- working-age individuals who are living in a household comprising a couple and at least one child under age 6 (percentage aged 18–59), by sex [LFPRCW]*	related to 5.4	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	24.2	24.2	88.9
	Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider (percentage of population aged 18 and older), by sex [FINACNT]*	8.10.2	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	6.8	6.8	20.1
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING	Share of managerial positions held (percentage), by sex [TMNG]	5.5.2	UNSDG. World Bank. Gender Portal. ¹²	2020	5.9	5.9	94.1
	Share of seats held in parliament (percentage), by sex [PR]	5.5.1	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	0	0	100
	Share of seats held in local government (percentage), by sex [LG]	5.5.1	UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.	2024	0	0	100
FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE	Ever- partnered women and girls subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months (percentage aged 15–49) [IPV]	5.2.1	UNDESA. UNSDG Database. ¹³	2018	34.7		

9. WHO. [Global Health Observatory](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

10. UNDESA. 2022. [Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2022](#). New York: United Nations Population Division.

11. UNFPA. [UNFPA Afghanistan: Data Overview](#). Accessed on 28 July 2024.

12. World Bank. [Afghanistan: Gender Data Portal](#). Accessed on 17 March 2025.

13. UNDESA. [UNSDG Database](#). Accessed on 13 June 2025.

* Indicator age bracket adjusted from SDG indicator.

^ The original estimate computed from the survey data was 31.6. However, it has not passed a test of plausibility and was downward adjusted. See Annex II for methodology.

LIFE AND GOOD HEALTH



Healthy life expectancy (SDG 3.7) in Afghanistan currently stands at 84.1 per cent for women and 86.4 per cent for men, according to data collected by WHO in 2024. Factors contributing to the slender gap in healthy life expectancy include systemic and social barriers that degrade women's health, such as inadequate infrastructure, bans on training new women health workers and gender-based discrimination in services. A **high adolescent birth rate** (SDG 3.7.2) – currently projected at 62 for every 1,000 women aged 15–19, higher than the global average of 41.3¹⁴ – is driven by child marriage and early childbearing and thrusts girls prematurely into adult roles and limits empowerment. Low access to modern means of contraception impedes women's ability to manage reproductive health and family planning; less than half of Afghan **women with a need for family planning have access to modern contraception** (SDG 3.7.1). Increasing obstacles to women's quality of life and access to healthcare foretell the likely widening gender gap in terms of life spent in good health.

SDG 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.



In 2024, **48.7%** of Afghan women satisfied their demand for **family planning with modern methods**.¹⁶



In 2021, **life spent in good health** as a proportion of life expectancy at birth was **84.1%** for women



and **86.4%** for men.¹⁵



In 2024, the **adolescent birth rate** is projected to be **62 for every 1,000** women and girls aged 15–19 in Afghanistan.¹⁷

14. WHO. 2023. [Global Data Observatory](#). Accessed on 17 March 2025.

15. WHO. [Global Health Observatory](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025. This indicator could not be measured by door-to-door surveys conducted during data collection for the present report.

16. UNDESA. 2022. [Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2022](#). New York: United Nations Population Division. Data could not be collected for this indicator during door-to-door surveys due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic. SDG indicator 5.6.1 measures the proportion of women aged 15–49 who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare. See UNDESA. 2022. [World Family Planning 2022](#). New York: United Nations. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

17. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). [UNFPA Afghanistan: Data Overview](#). Accessed on 28 July 2024.

LIFE SPENT BY AFGHAN WOMEN IN GOOD HEALTH



SDG 3.7

There is a slender gender gap in favour of men in Afghanistan in terms of life spent in good health, although women face increasing challenges in living a long, healthy life. For measuring this SDG 3.7 indicator, UN Women drew on publicly available 2021 data from the WHO. While figures have not been updated since August 2021, the situation has likely declined given greater obstacles in accessing gender-sensitive, timely and quality health services. Restrictions on women's freedom of movement, requirements to be accompanied by a *mahram* in seeking care, bans on training new women health workers, and reductions in the number of skilled women health workers have had devastating impacts on women's access to health. As a result, women are likely to spend progressively less of their lives in good health.

Life spent by women in good health reflects the ability and freedom of women and men to enjoy the fullness of life in good health and bodily integrity. The gender gap often denotes deficiencies in women's sexual and reproductive health as well as inequities in access to health services.

Measure: Life spent in good health as a proportion (percentage) of life expectancy at birth, by sex. The ratio of healthy life expectancy to overall life expectancy reflects the extent to which the person can live to the end of a human life of average estimated length in good health.

Analysis

From 2000 to 2021, the gender gap in good health narrowed, in tandem with improvements in the health system and increased life expectancy. In 2021, Afghan women had a life expectancy at birth of 61 years, compared to 57.4 for men.¹⁸



In 2021, life spent in good health as a proportion of life expectancy at birth was **84.1%** for women.



and **86.4%** for men.¹⁹

Limited data collection since the Taliban takeover makes it challenging to assess the impact of the subsequent collapse of the public health system, the imposition of gendered restrictions on access to health centres,²⁰ bans on education eliminating the pipeline of new post-primary school educated and skilled female health workers, and an overall climate of fear that leaves many women too afraid to leave their homes.

18. Afghan women's life expectancy at birth increased by 5.6 years between 2000 and 2021, from 54.4 to 61 years. Afghan men's life expectancy at birth increased by 4.2 years between 2002 and 2021, from 53.2 to 57.4 years. WHO. [Global Health Observatory](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

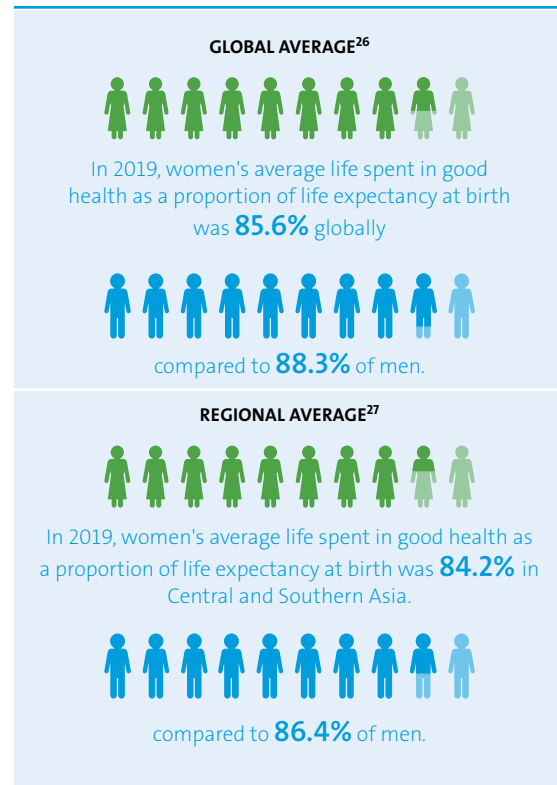
19. Ibid. This indicator could not be measured by door-to-door surveys conducted during data collection for the present report.

20. Beyond the national decree that women cannot travel more than 78 kilometres without being accompanied by a *mahram* (close male relative) and the recent law of August 2024 that bans women from using public transport without a *mahram*, some provinces have issued clear instructions that women cannot enter health clinics without a *mahram*. Nader, Z., and N. Amini. 2022. ["The Taliban Are Harming Afghan Women's Health."](#) Foreign Policy, 2 March. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

Women have specific health needs that make them more vulnerable to health concerns such as sexual and reproductive risks. Examples include maternal morbidity and mortality, which are both exacerbated by social practices such as forced and child marriage. Gender norms amplify vulnerability to health risks in general; Afghan women often lack the power and agency to make decisions about their own health since conservative norms make men responsible for household decisions. Moreover, women, at a disproportionately higher rate than men, reduce health-seeking behaviour during moments of resource scarcity, as they tend to have been socialized to act as “societal shock absorbers”, prioritizing the well-being of others over their own. This increases the likelihood of resorting to negative coping mechanisms and facing exploitation.²¹

Current DFA restrictions targeting women and girls have detrimental impacts on health by limiting access to education and job opportunities, codifying gender pay gaps,²² and reducing financial security and asset ownership. Women are highly dependent on male family members to leave the home, compromising their ability to seek health services in emergencies and complicating their access in general. Obtaining healthcare has long been difficult for women in rural areas²³ and is increasingly so for women in urban areas. More complex services related to sexual and reproductive health are out of reach for most women. Taken together, these factors result in women receiving lower levels of care to cover even basic health needs.²⁴

Differences between women’s and men’s self-assessed physical health are minimal based on 2024 data collected.²⁵ There are several possible explanations, including the fact that women may be more likely to subordinate their own health needs to those of other family members and thus are less likely to report poor health.



21. UN Women. 2024. [Gender Country Profile: Afghanistan](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. 2023. [Afghanistan Rapid Gender Analysis 2023](#). November. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

22. In June 2024, the DFA introduced a directive capping the salaries of women civil servants still on the state payroll but not allowed to go to work. This placed an AFN 5,000 (approximately USD 70) upper limit on the monthly salary receivable by women civil servants.

23. Prior to August 2021, rural women typically required a *mahram* and comprehensive health services were only available in provincial centres. Bjelica, J. 2021. [Rural Women's Access to Health: Poverty, Insecurity and Traditions Are the Main Obstacles](#). Afghanistan Analysts Network. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

24. In 2022, only 10 per cent of Afghan women surveyed indicated being able to cover their basic health needs with the health services available to them, compared with 23 per cent of Afghan men. Ground Truth Solutions, Awaaz Afghanistan and WHO. 2022. [Protecting and Improving Healthcare: Community Insight from Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

25. Responses show similar percentages of women and men reporting “good” or “very good” physical health (70 per cent of women, 73 per cent of men) as well as “poor” or “very poor” physical health (14 per cent of women, 15 per cent of men). UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

26. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

27. Ibid.

Life expectancy

Women's life expectancy in Afghanistan is much lower than global levels and is expected to worsen. Policies restricting their rights and freedoms increase the risk of dying prematurely, for example, as maternal mortality risks worsen due to high fertility rates²⁸ and lower levels of healthcare. The December 2024 ban on women's medical training means there will be no new midwives and nurses trained to treat Afghan women. In a context where gender segregation is strictly enforced in many areas, seeing a male doctor is not always possible.

The lesser gender gap in Afghanistan, compared to regional and global averages indicates Afghan women's ill health (Figure 1). Prior to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghan women were expected to live 3.6 years longer than the average Afghan man. On average, globally, women live five years longer than men. Even in neighbouring Pakistan, the difference between Pakistani women and men was 4.8 years in 2021 – 68.6 for women and 63.8 for men.²⁹

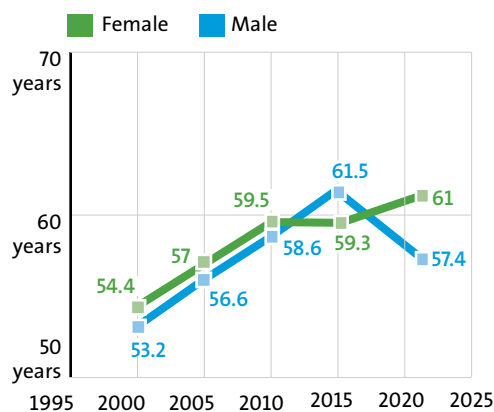


Figure 1 Life expectancy at birth in Afghanistan (years)³⁰

Life expectancy at birth began balancing out between Afghan women and men from 2000 to 2010. The gender gap increased significantly between 2015 and 2021. Fluctuations in the number of civilian casualties per year, most of which were men, help to explain the larger gender gap.³¹ The prevalence of severe disability among Afghan adults increased significantly in a similar time frame, showing the real impact of armed conflict.³²

The significant decline in armed conflict-related deaths across Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover could lead to a spike in life expectancy, particularly among men, in the coming years. The gender gap in life expectancy will likely widen as men exit the battlefield and women face increasing restrictions to access even the most basic of health services.

Access to health services

During the 2024 survey conducted by UN Women, the majority of women and men respondents reported being able to access health services fairly easily, in both urban and rural settings.³³ A greater proportion of women (32 per cent compared to 25 per cent of men) reported difficulty in accessing health services.³⁴ Challenges in accessing services for women will likely continue to worsen given the steady stream of restrictions enacted by the DFA to limit women's fundamental freedoms.

Among men and women who reported that it was difficult to travel to the nearest clinic, the greatest percentage cited distance as the main challenge (89 per cent), followed by the cost of transportation (48 per cent). Although travel times are longer for rural women,³⁵ 29 per cent of women in urban areas also indicated that distance was a barrier.³⁶ Travelling as a woman in a city is particularly complex – specifically in navigating checkpoints, traffic and public transport.

28. UNFPA. [Afghanistan Dashboard](#). Accessed on 10 September 2024.

29. World Bank. [World Development Indicators](#). Accessed on 17 July 2024.

30. WHO. [Data Portal](#). Accessed on 3 April 2025.

31. 2015 had a particularly high number of civilians casualties (4,982) compared to 2010 (3,271) and 2019 (3,973). Civilian casualties were especially high between 2014 and 2018, with a spike gain recorded in 2021. Women have typically made up less than 15 per cent of casualties and children less than 30 per cent. UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan). 2021. [Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

32. The prevalence of "severe" disability among Afghan adults rose from 2.7 per cent in 2005 to 13.9 per cent in 2019, with 65 per cent having "mild" or "moderate" disabilities. Among children, over 80 per cent had no disability, 6.6 per cent had "mild," 7.1 per cent "moderate," and 3.5 per cent "severe" disabilities, with similar rates for girls and boys. "Severe" disability ranged from 8.5 per cent in Kabul to 25.4 per cent in Central Highlands, reflecting limited health services in remote areas. People with a "severe disability" face substantial limitations, needing continuous assistance and extensive support. A "moderate disability" involves requiring regular help and support devices. A "mild disability" causes minor difficulties, needing limited support. The Asia Foundation. 2020. [Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

33. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

34. Ibid.

35. According to the UN Women survey in 2024, some 34 per cent of rural respondents (both men and women), compared to 1 per cent of urban respondents, said that it took them from one to three hours to reach the nearest clinic by the transport option they most commonly use. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

36. Surveyed women who reported distance as a challenge in accessing healthcare generally indicated the travel time was one hour or less for urban areas and slightly more than an hour in rural areas. In the 2020 National Statistics and Information Authority study, 52 per cent of Afghans reported that they could access a district or provincial hospital within two hours of travel time, and 66 per cent could reach a private doctor or clinic within the same amount of time. A further 81.6 per cent indicated that they could reach a pharmacy within two hours. Government of Afghanistan. 2021. [Income and Expenditure and Labor Force Surveys Report 2020](#). National Statistics and Information Authority. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

Men are likely to be more used to these issues and are allowed to drive a car or motorbike, which women are prohibited from doing.³⁷

Restrictions on freedom of movement also impact women's access to health. The recent morality law published by the DFA in August 2024, which has officially banned women from using public and private transport without a *mahram*, codified a harsher restriction than an earlier 2021 decree. Dependence on a *mahram* puts timely and accessible health services in jeopardy for many women.

The concern most frequently cited by Afghan women and men alike was the inadequacy of health facilities and services. Those surveyed by UN Women in 2024 repeatedly shared the following issues: a lack of accessible and adequate quality healthcare facilities; low-quality care due to shortages of trained, specialized and attentive medical professionals; insufficient or poor-quality essential medical supplies and the inability to pay for medicine.³⁸

Restrictions targeting Afghan women also affect existing female health workers, complicating their access to work through restrictions on freedom of movement, dress requirements and the fear of harassment outside the home. This may further reduce access to care. A concern looking forward is that women's access to quality health services will decline further due to the reductions in skilled female health staff that will inevitably result from the bans on women's education, which now extend to medical institutes. Over time, the number of university-educated women will fall to zero, brain drain will continue to drive women professionals out of Afghanistan, and no new midwives or nurses will be trained after the December 2024 ban on women's medical training. Afghan women and girls will be left with a diminishing pool of skilled female health staff to treat them – a requirement for most women to seek care as treatment by male health staff is not acceptable according to social norms and, in many areas, DFA policies.

These health-related challenges can compound other gendered inequalities, leading to different health outcomes for women. This can be seen in a higher proportion of women who report living with some form of disability (54.6 per cent) compared to men (45.4 per cent), including higher levels of moderate (43.9 per cent) and severe disabilities (14.9 per cent) than men (36.2 per cent and 12.6 per cent, respectively).³⁹ The gender difference could be explained by the high levels of domestic violence and unequal access to health care experienced by women, but it may also be that men are underreporting injury or disability.

Mental health

Women and girls face a grave mental health crisis rooted in decades of conflict and exacerbated by restrictions on their fundamental freedoms and rights. Reports suggest high levels of anxiety and depression as well as suicidal ideation and suicide.⁴⁰ Data on mental and physical health among school-aged girls is not available, yet anecdotal reports indicate that the closure of future educational and employment opportunities and prospects has had a devastating impact on their mental health. In the past, mental health issues have in particular been cited as among the greatest challenges faced by Afghans reporting moderate or severe levels of disability.⁴¹

37. Of those who indicated distance as a challenge, women were more than twice as likely as men to take public transport (27 per cent compared to 13 per cent); men were more likely to walk or take a motorbike. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

38. Ibid.

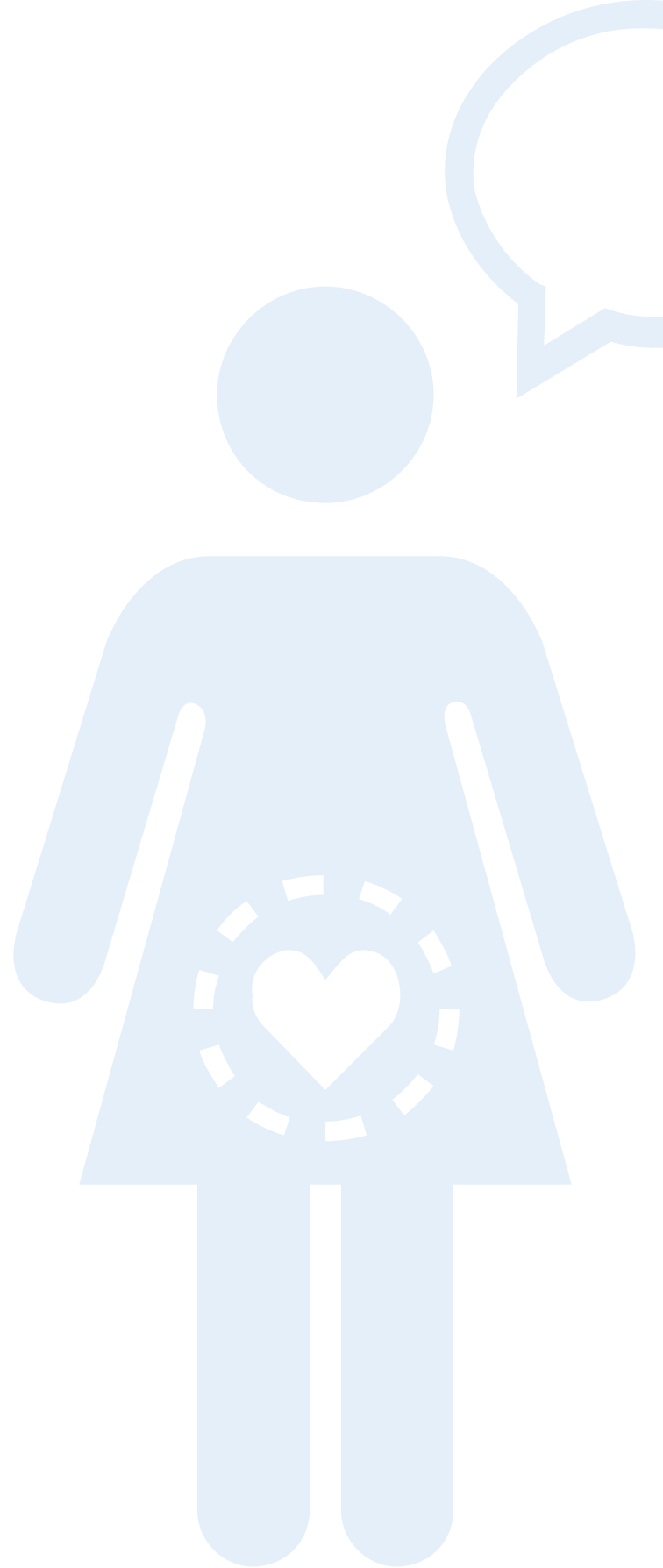
39. The Asia Foundation. 2020. [Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

40. Large shares of women surveyed in July 2024 reported feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression as "very bad" or "bad" (40 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively). UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025. In March 2023, 48 per cent of Afghan women and girls surveyed indicated knowing at least one woman or girl who had suffered from anxiety or depression since August 2021; alarmingly, 8 per cent of respondents indicated knowing a woman or girl who had attempted suicide. Bishnaw - Women's Voices for an Inclusive and Sustainable Peace. 2023. [Bishnaw March 2023 Survey: Impact of Taliban Restrictions on Afghan Women's Economic Conditions and Mental Health](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

41. The challenges reported included not having enough energy for everyday life, lacking sufficient money and companionship, and feeling isolated and alone. The Asia Foundation. 2020. [Model Disability Survey of Afghanistan 2019](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

The curtailment of women's and girls' access to leisure activities, including a formal ban on women going to parks, nature areas and gyms, as well as de facto bans on women gathering in social spaces, negatively affect physical and mental health. A recent report highlighted how DFA restrictions affect women's sense of potential, limiting their sense of self-worth and ambitions.⁴² At the same time, men's stringent performance of masculine gender roles to maintain socially constructed gendered expectations around being breadwinners and protectors was a significant burden on their daily lives.

Afghan women rarely meet other women outside their household. In a three-month period from January to March 2024, 21 per cent of Afghan women surveyed indicated they had not met socially with any other women outside their household or family.⁴³ This figure was double in urban areas (41 per cent),⁴⁴ implying the relatively greater freedom of women in rural areas to leave the home and interact with other female community members. When Afghan women do meet with women from outside their household, they are mainly limited to doing so inside the home, or, on rare occasions, at health centres (e.g., the waiting room) or markets.



42. Salma Consulting. 2024. '[Mental Health Assessment: Improve UNFPA's Psychosocial Response and Increase Access to Services in Afghanistan](#)'. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

43. Of women surveyed, 2 per cent indicated meeting women from outside their household daily; 7 per cent met weekly; 30 per cent met one or two times per month; 41 per cent met less than once per month; and 21 per cent indicated not meeting any women from outside their household. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

44. Ibid.

DEMAND FOR FAMILY PLANNING THROUGH MODERN CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS



SDG 3.7

Since 2001, Afghan women's use of modern contraceptives had been steadily increasing, with results including reductions in maternal mortality. Modern methods of contraception continue to be officially available following the Taliban takeover. Despite some concerns about restrictive practices in certain provinces (including Maidan Wardak and Balkh), the DFA have stated that there is no ban on the use of modern contraception. Nevertheless, resourcing constraints in health services and the forced closure of family planning services put women's access to modern contraceptives at risk across the country.

This indicator measures access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including modern contraception, as an essential aspect of women's lives that allows them to fully realize their potential. The indicator gauges the extent to which women have the freedom to decide whether and when to bear children (and how many), and whether they have the information, education and means (including access to services) to make those choices.

Measure: Percentage of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) who desire either to have no (additional) children or to postpone having their next child, and who are currently using a modern method of contraception. The indicator is also called “demand for family planning satisfied with modern methods”.⁴⁵



In 2024, **48.7%** of Afghan women satisfied their demand for family planning with modern methods.⁴⁶

Analysis

The use of modern methods of contraception for birth spacing has long been promoted in Afghanistan to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.⁴⁷ This strategy is based on evidence that spacing pregnancies by over two years can cut maternal and infant mortality by 30 and 10 per cent, respectively.⁴⁸ Short intervals between pregnancies increase the risk of uterine rupture, pre-term birth, low birth weight, adverse perinatal outcomes, and impaired neurodevelopmental and cognitive abilities in children.⁴⁹ In 2018, one in every five married women of reproductive age in Afghanistan gave birth to a child within 18 months of her previous delivery.⁵⁰

45. Modern methods of contraception include female and male sterilization, intrauterine devices, implants, injectables, oral contraceptive pills, male and female condoms, vaginal barrier methods (including the diaphragm, cervical cap and spermicidal foam, jelly, cream and sponges), the lactational amenorrhea method, emergency contraception and others.

46. UNDESA. 2022. [Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2022](#). New York: United Nations Population Division. Data could not be collected for this indicator during door-to-door surveys due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic. SDG indicator 5.6.1 measures the proportion of women aged 15–49 who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare. See UNDESA. 2022. [World Family Planning 2022](#). New York: United Nations. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

47. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

48. WHO. 2013. [Programming Strategies for Postpartum Family Planning](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

49. Conde-Agudelo, A., A. Rosas-Bermudez, F. Castano et al. 2012. “Effects of Birth Spacing on Maternal, Perinatal, Infant, and Child Health: A Systematic Review of Causal Mechanisms.” *Studies in Family Planning* 43: 93–114. See also Dong, H., J. Chi, W. Wang et al. 2023. “Association Between Interpregnancy Interval and Maternal and Neonatal Adverse Outcomes in Women with a Caesarean Delivery: A Population-Based Study.” *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 23: 284.

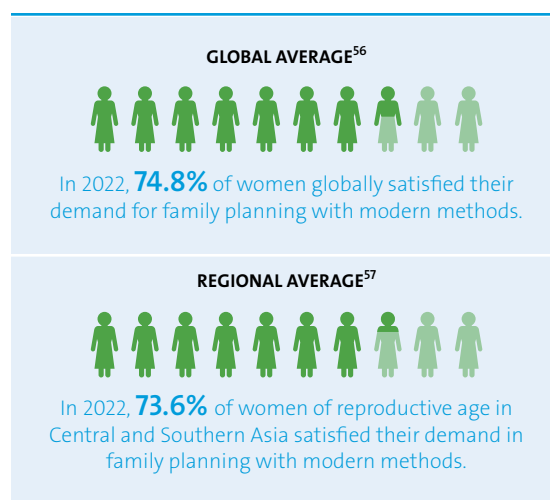
50. Shafiqullah, H., A. Morita, K. Nakamura et al. 2018. “[The Family Planning Conundrum in Afghanistan](#).” *Health Promotion International* 33(2). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

YEAR	PREVALENCE OF MODERN METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION	UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING THROUGH MODERN METHODS
2010	15.9%	28.2%
2015	17.8%	27.6%
2020	21.6%	27.3%
2024	25.4%	26.7%

Table 1 Use of modern contraception and unmet need in Afghanistan, 2010–2024⁵¹

In 2015, 17.8 per cent of married women used modern methods of contraception. That same year, one in two married and in-union Afghan women⁵² (aged 15–49) indicated a desire to either delay their next pregnancy by at least two years (24 per cent) or limit childbearing (26 per cent).⁵³ Married women aged 35–44 reported the highest use of contraception (roughly 30 per cent), with the lower end of the range demarcated by married women and girls aged 15–19 (7 per cent), who are more likely to be actively trying to bear children.⁵⁴

Although the most recent data on the prevalence of modern contraceptive use among married women was collected in 2015, various indicators point to continued increased use until 2020. The significant reduction in maternal mortality rates between 2000 and 2020 (from 1,346 per 100,000 live births to 620 per 100,000 live births) suggests that the acceptance and use of modern contraception likely grew during this period.⁵⁵



Additionally, fertility rates among Afghan women have fallen significantly since 2000, when women had an average of 7.65 children. By 2010, the number had declined to 6.37 and is projected to be 3.71 in 2024.⁵⁸ These two trends – decrease in maternal mortality and decline in fertility rate – both infer uptake in use of modern contraception.

51. UNDESA. 2022. [Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2022](#). New York: United Nations Population Division. Data could not be collected for this indicator during door-to-door surveys due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic. SDG indicator 5.6.1 measures the proportion of women aged 15–49 who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare. See UNDESA. 2022. [World Family Planning 2022](#). New York: United Nations. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

52. Osmani, A. K., et al. 2015. “Factors Influencing Contraceptive Use Among Women in Afghanistan: Secondary Analysis of Afghanistan Health Survey 2012.” *Nagoya Journal of Medical Science* 77(4): 551–61. Accessed on 3 March 2025. In 2011, almost 10 per cent of married women used an injectable form of contraception and 6 per cent used a pill. Government of Afghanistan. 2013. [Afghanistan Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey \(MICS\) 2010–2011: Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children](#). Central Statistics Organization.

53. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

54. Ibid.

55. WHO. [Data Portal](#). Accessed on 16 July 2024.

56. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women’s empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

57. Ibid.

58. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). [UNFPA Afghanistan: Data Overview](#). Accessed on 28 July 2024.

Variables influencing women's use of modern contraception

Unsurprisingly, education and wealth have strong influences on women's use of modern contraception. In a 2015 nationwide health survey, the rate of currently married women aged 15–49 using modern contraceptive methods was approximately 19 per cent among those with no education.⁵⁹ It was 22 per cent, 26 per cent, 30 per cent, among women with primary and secondary, and beyond secondary education. In 2015, recommendations to the then-Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan based on the survey acknowledged the substantial impact that education levels have on the use of contraception.⁶⁰ Access to information and media exposure, particularly through radio programmes, also boost the use of modern methods of contraception.⁶¹

The role of wealth is evident in the fact that women in the most economically advantaged households are more than twice as likely to use modern contraception as their counterparts in the most economically disadvantaged households (37 per cent compared to 15 per cent).⁶²

Similarly, access to information and media exposure – particularly through radio programmes – were found to increase use of contraception.

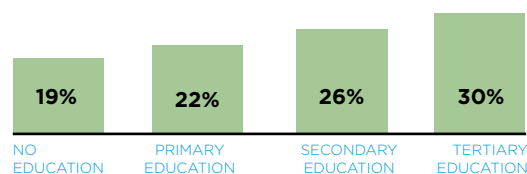


Figure 2 Modern contraception use among women in Afghanistan according to education level, 2015⁶³

The number of children women had, especially sons, was linked to contraceptive use, indicating that women used contraception to avoid becoming pregnant once they had reached a desired number

of (male) children, rather than for the purposes of birth spacing.⁶⁴ This implies that social norms are the key determinant for the level of contraception use. Therefore, if social norms shift in a regressive direction, women and girls may be less likely to use contraception and decrease birth spacing.

Expected trends under the de facto authorities

While the current policy of the DFA regarding modern contraception remains ambivalent, policies restricting women's freedoms, including education and economic opportunities, risk dampening contraceptive use and increasing the fertility rate. Despite the de facto Ministry of Public Health stating that there has been no restriction on access to contraception, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has recorded instances where the de facto Departments for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in the provinces of Balkh and Maidan Wardak have issued verbal instructions to stop providing birth control to women.⁶⁵ The 2022 ban on women NGO workers also impacts contraceptive use as women's organizations have historically played an important role in disseminating vital health information to women and girls.

As women's opportunities for income generation continue to shrink and conservative gender norms intensify, expectations on the role of women to bear children are likely to escalate. Statistical forecasting correlates the ban on education for women and girls with a greater risk of child marriage, early childbearing and maternal mortality.⁶⁶ These statistical projections estimate that the restrictions on education will be associated with the child marriage rate among girls increasing by 25 per cent, early childbearing among adolescent girls climbing by 45 per cent, and maternal mortality among girls and women rising by at least 50 per cent.⁶⁷

59. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

60. A 2015 study noted that in lieu of reaching the universal female education target and benefitting from the knock-on effects of increasing the use of modern contraception, the Government should engage religious leaders in family planning awareness. Osmani, A. K., et al. 2015.

61. Ibid.

62. Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and UNICEF. 2012. [Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011: Final Report](#). Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and UNICEF. Accessed 3 March 2025.

63. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

64. Osmani, A. K., et al. 2015. "Factors Influencing Contraceptive Use Among Women in Afghanistan: Secondary Analysis of Afghanistan Health Survey 2012." *Nagoya Journal of Medical Science* 77(4): 551–61. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

65. UNAMA. 2024. [De Facto Authorities' Moral Oversight in Afghanistan: Impacts on Human Rights](#). Human Rights Service. July. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

66. Linear regression analysis at the country-level shows how the risk of worsening sexual and reproductive health indicators correlates to educational attainment. UN Women. 2024. [Gender Country Profile: Afghanistan](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

67. Ibid.

ADOLESCENT BIRTH RATE



SDG 3.7

Between 2000 and 2021, the adolescent birth rate fell by nearly half in Afghanistan. In 2002, an estimated average of 150.2 out of every 1,000 women who gave birth did so as adolescents (aged 15–19).⁶⁸ The number had declined to 67 by 2021. Modelling projects the adolescent birthrate in 2024 to be at 62.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, risk factors continue to increase following the Taliban takeover with the elimination of schooling for girls beyond grade six; reduced access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and education services; and projected increases in child marriage, linked in part to the protracted humanitarian crisis. As a result, improvements in the adolescent birth rate are expected to reverse.

This indicator measures the extent to which women and girls have the freedom to decide when to bear children. It links to the risks of early motherhood, including maternal morbidity and mortality, and accompanying impediments to other dimensions of women's empowerment.



In 2024, the **adolescent birth rate** is projected to be **62 for every 1,000** women and girls aged 15–19 in Afghanistan.⁷²

Measure: Number of births per 1,000 women and girls aged 15–19 years.

Analysis

Between 2001 and 2021, during the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the rate of marriage among girls under age 18 fell markedly.⁷⁰ This was in part due to the implementation from 2001 to 2021 of the Afghan Civil Law (1977), which set the minimum age for marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys. In the absence of an official legal framework, in December 2021, the Taliban outlawed forced marriage and the practice of giving a woman in restitution (*baad*), and granted women the right to consent to marriage through a decree.⁷¹

A minimum age for marriage, however, was not set in this decree, leaving girls vulnerable to localized norms and practices by family decision-makers, community and religious leaders, and DFA officials.

According to survey data collected by UN Women in 2024, the average age at which a woman in Afghanistan first gets married is 19.8 years, though it is not uncommon for girls to marry as young as 14.⁷³ Under the DFA, reports continue to suggest that forced and child marriages are taking place across the country despite the December 2021 decree banning forced marriage.⁷⁴ In 2023, 28.7 per cent of girls under age 18 were married as well as 9.6 per cent of those under 15.⁷⁵

68. World Bank. [Gender Data Portal: Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 17 July 2024.

69. Ibid.

70. UNICEF. 2023. [Statistical profile on child marriage: Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 17 March 2024.

71. United Nations. 2023. [Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan: Note by the Secretary-General](#). A/78/338, 1 September. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

72. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). [UNFPA Afghanistan: Data Overview](#). Accessed on 28 July 2024.

73. Most men similarly reported marrying between the ages of 19 and 24, with the average age of marriage being 23.0 years.

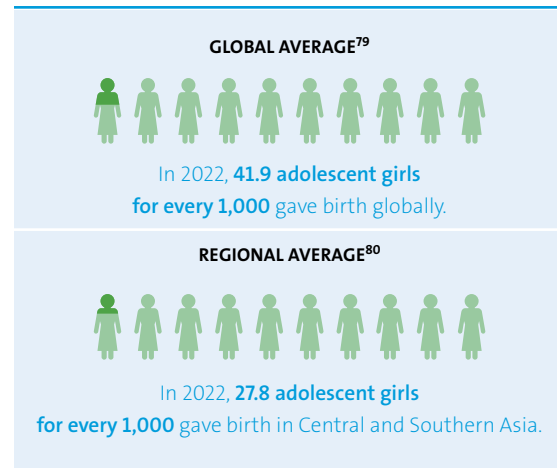
74. It also appears to be used as a way of either avoiding or securing marriage to Taliban members. Amnesty International. 2022. [Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls under Taliban Rule](#). Rawadari. 2023. [The Human Rights Situation of Children in Afghanistan: Violations of Civil and Political Rights](#). August 2021 – October 2023.

75. UNICEF. 2023. [Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2022-23, Summary Findings Report](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

In the same year, a study reported an increase in the percentage of women-headed households arranging child marriage for daughters – from 2 per cent in 2022 to 11 per cent in 2023, amid escalating economic and protection needs.⁷⁶ This phenomenon disproportionately affects girls from economically disadvantaged families in rural areas. One driver of increasing forced marriage is the protracted humanitarian and economic crises facing the country. It has become a coping mechanism for families struggling to make ends meet.

Drivers of adolescent childbearing

Prevailing cultural norms in Afghan society expect couples to have their first child within a year of their marriage. A birth, particularly of a son, solidifies a woman's position within the family and broader community.⁷⁷ Little consideration is given to the age of the mother. Instead, confirmation that the couple can reproduce is prioritized, often at the expense of a woman's agency and bodily autonomy. In Afghanistan, being unable to give birth to a child puts a woman at risk of being divorced or having her husband take a second wife to bear children, lowering her status and decision-making power within the household.⁷⁸



The elimination of schooling for girls beyond grade six and reduced access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and education services, are all risk factors that point to a potential increase in the adolescent birth rate. Combined with economic stress, these drivers could propel more cases of child and forced marriage as well as practices such as *baad*.⁸¹ Statistical modelling estimates that the ban on girls education could result in a 25 per cent increase in the child marriage rate.⁸² This would put 37.5 per cent of Afghan girls at risk of child marriage and increase the incidence of adolescent pregnancy.

76. [Whole of Afghanistan Assessment \(WoAA\) 2023](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

77. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women Survey 2024. Unpublished.

78. Ibid.

79. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

80. Ibid.

81. A study exploring the continued prevalence in Afghan society of practices such as *baad* found that it was deemed acceptable in cases where the families involved benefit from the marriage. This was the case for 25 per cent of participants in Kandahar Province, 17 per cent in Paktya and 15 per cent in Herat. See Spotlight Initiative. 2023. Study on Prevention and Protection Mechanisms Relating to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices.

82. This modelling demonstrates the risks of detrimental consequences within five years (2021–2026) without changes in DFA policies on the education of girls and women. UN Women. 2024. [“Future Projections for Afghan Women and Girls.”](#) Accessed on 3 March 2025.

EDUCATION, SKILL-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE



DFA bans on education for women and girls beyond primary school have instituted a path where the overall **secondary school completion rate** for the female population above age 18 years (related to SDG 4.1.2) will drop to zero. Indicators for education do not take into account online or underground schooling as these – while vital for survival – are not a substitute for formal education. The systemic nature of the education ban is illustrated in the rate of **women currently not in education, employment or training** (NEET) (SDG 8.6.1), which in 2024 is almost four times higher than the rate for men (78 per cent compared to 20 per cent, respectively).⁸³ These findings highlight a gender gap in education and livelihoods that is expected to widen as women are increasingly excluded from opportunities to build skills and acquire knowledge essential to participating in the economy. The latest ban on women attending medical institutes illustrates that the pathway in Afghanistan involves increasing restrictions to education, not improvement.

SDG 4.1: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

SDG 8.6: By 2030, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.



In 2024, among women aged 18–29, **77.6%** are currently **not in education, employment or training**.



The figure for men is **20.2%**.⁸⁵



In 2024, **11.8%** of women over the age of 18 **completed secondary education** or higher.

However, under the DFA, **0%** of Afghan girls and young women are allowed to complete secondary education in the years to come



compared to **28.9%** of men in 2024.⁸⁴

83. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

84. This included girls who had completed grades 12, 13, 14 and 15, undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPLETION AMONG WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN



SDG 4.1

Afghanistan's secondary school completion rate for girls is significantly lower than the global average and on its way to zero. Rolling back substantial progress in school attendance and completion between 2001 and 2021, the current ban on women and girls accessing any formal schooling beyond the primary level was extended in December 2024 to include previously exempted tertiary health courses (e.g., midwifery and nursing). In 2024, the secondary school completion rate among women 18 years and above was already less than half the rate among men. These figures capture the population that completed secondary school before the introduction of the ban on girls' education beyond grade six.

This indicator measures the percentage of girls who have completed upper-secondary education and higher, which signifies paths to more resources and opportunities in life, including to obtain skills that would potentially allow access to employment and political representation.

Measure: The percentage of the female population aged 18 years and older that has completed at least upper-secondary education.

Analysis

Data collected by UN Women in 2024 show that the average number of years of schooling for women was 3.37.⁸⁶ Men had almost double the number, at 6.7 years. Over half the female population surveyed (55.4 per cent) had not completed any level of schooling, including *madrassa* education, compared to less than one third of men (31.6 per cent).

Primary school attendance and completion rates collected by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) show additional gender inequities. In data collected between September 2022 and February 2023, 54.1 per cent of boys attended primary school compared to 40.6 per cent of girls.⁸⁷



In 2024, **11.8%** of women over the age of 18 completed secondary education or higher.

However, under the DFA, **0%** of Afghan girls and young women are allowed to complete secondary education in the years to come



compared to **28.9%** of men in 2024.⁸⁸

In other data collected in June 2023 by the World Bank, girls' attendance reached 60 per cent; for boys, attendance climbed to 68 per cent.⁸⁹ This higher level of attendance could reflect a fear among parents of further restrictions on schooling and a desire to maximize the education of their children while opportunities still exist. Another factor could be the reduction of armed conflict, making the commute to school safer for children.

86. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

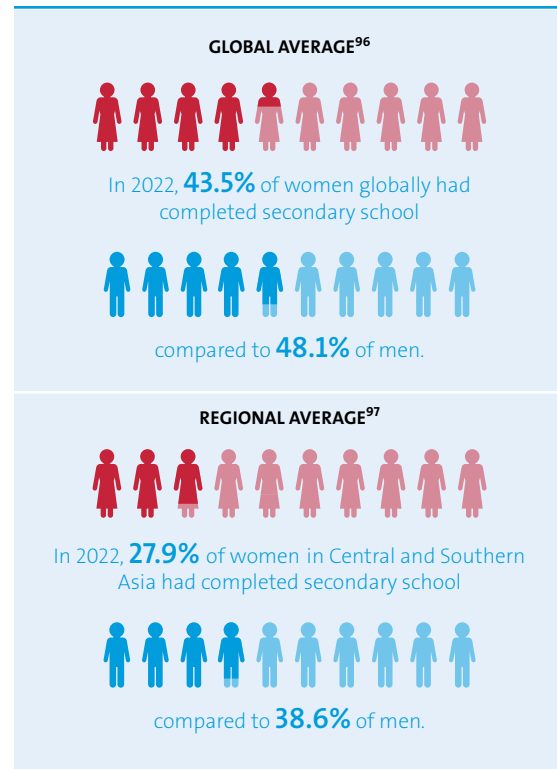
87. UNICEF. 2023. [Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2022-23, Summary Findings Report](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

88. Data collected under UN Women's 2024 survey. This included girls who had completed grades 12, 13, 14, and 15, undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

89. World Bank, 2023. [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey \(AWMS\), Round 3](#). October. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

Not all recent data on primary school attendance mirror this increase.⁹⁰ Consultations by UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNAMA found that some parents see less value in educating their children, particularly girls, if they will be unable to continue their education past primary school.⁹¹ This compounds concerns, even prior to the Taliban takeover, of caregivers that schooling did not benefit their children adequately.⁹²

At all levels of education, gender norms influence decisions to drop out of school. Among girls, dropping out is mainly linked to marriage and family preferences, whereas among boys, it is most frequently explained by the need to earn income to support the household. UN Women's 2024 survey data show that in rural and urban areas, girls were most likely to not complete secondary school because their family preferred them not to or forced them to stop studying (46.5 per cent) or due to marriage (19.8 per cent).⁹³ Boys typically left school early to earn money (40.7 per cent) or to work at home (22.2 per cent).⁹⁴ The income level of the family had a dramatic impact on primary school attendance, with 75.8 per cent of children from the richest quintile attending primary school compared to only 25.3 per cent from the lowest wealth quintile.⁹⁵



UN Women's 2024 survey showed that post-secondary education was extremely limited among women and men, with only 5.9 per cent of women completing university or technical tertiary education, mainly to gain teaching diplomas and nursing certificates.⁹⁸ Only 3.1 per cent of women had attained an undergraduate degree compared to 6.5 per cent of men.⁹⁹ While some girls access informal schooling, a vital lifeline of hope in the current context, informal learning is not a substitute for formal education. Reflecting this point, globally, indicators for education capture formal education only.

90. UNESCO Institute for Statistics data show a drop from 2015 to 2022. In 2015, primary school attendance was 54.6 per cent (female) and 76.7 per cent (male). This fell to 39.8 per cent (female) and 54.2 per cent (male) in 2022. These figures tell a slightly different story from those of the World Bank above, highlighting the challenging environment in which to undertake data collection and analysis. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [Data Browser](#). Accessed on 18 March 2025.

91. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

92. Poor-quality education is evidenced by low learning outcomes. A 2017 survey of learning outcomes in language and mathematics reported: "After spending 4 years in primary school, around 65 per cent of Afghan students have only fully mastered Grade 1 Language curriculum and less than half of them mastered Grade 1 Mathematics curriculum." Molina, E., et al. 2018. [The Learning Crisis in Afghanistan: Results of the Afghanistan SABER Service Delivery Survey 2017](#). Washington, DC: World Bank. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

93. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

94. Ibid.

95. This divides the population into five equal parts, measuring the primary school attendance of the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent. UNICEF. 2023. [Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2022-23, Summary Findings Report](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

96. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

97. Ibid.

98. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

99. Ibid.

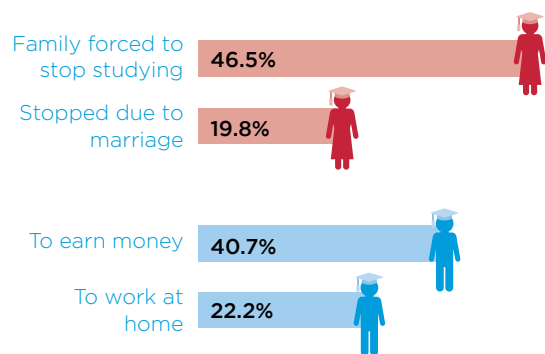


Figure 3 Reasons for not completing secondary school among Afghan girls and boys¹⁰⁰

School enrolment among girls between 2001 and 2021

Historically, conditions for education in Afghanistan have been complex and varied. By 1996, when the Taliban first seized power, education rates for girls at the primary, and thus, secondary and tertiary levels were already low. The period between 1992 and 1996 immediately before the first Taliban rule saw a reversal of many gains under the previous communist Government. Between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban banned girls from attending school, impacting the opportunities available to a generation of women.¹⁰¹

Enrolment increased markedly from 2001 onward, alongside greater development support to the education sector. That year, an estimated 1 million students were enrolled across all education levels nationwide; by 2018, the figure had grown to 10 million.¹⁰² The number of girls in primary school rose from virtually zero to 2.5 million.

Nevertheless, significant gender disparities remained. Data from 2019 indicate that 69 per cent of Afghan girls aged 16–18 were not in upper-secondary school compared to 46 per cent of boys that age.¹⁰³ Only 32 per cent of adolescent girls were literate compared to 62 per cent of adolescent boys.¹⁰⁴

DFA bans on secondary and tertiary education for girls

Since August 2021, the DFA have imposed increasingly strict prohibitions on girls' access to education, leaving the majority out of school. Although primary schools reopened within 10 days of the takeover in August 2021 (for both girls and boys), secondary school for girls was officially suspended in March 2022 until further notice. Over 100,000 female university students were banned from education in December 2022.¹⁰⁵ In January 2023, the DFA banned girls from taking the *kankor* university entrance examination – reversing examination participation rates for girls that, in some provinces, had exceeded those for boys before August 2021.¹⁰⁶ As of April 2023, 80 per cent of school-aged girls and young women – 2.5 million people – were out of school, including 1.1 million secondary school-aged girls.¹⁰⁷ Initially, health-related university education was exempt from this ban. This changed in December 2024 when the Taliban officially banned women from attending medical institutes.

Public and private secondary schools remain closed to girls and women nationwide. While some provinces relied on local discretion during 2022–2023 to allow secondary schools to remain open, most of the country saw a complete closure of secondary and tertiary learning as well as private courses.¹⁰⁸ In May 2023, all secondary schools still open nationwide were forced to close their doors to girls. Costs due to the loss of potential income that girls would have earned if they had completed their education as well as reduced future economic opportunities for them and their families are estimated at USD 1.5 billion by 2030.¹⁰⁹ While underground schools remain active and vital for the survival of Afghans across the country, they are not a sustainable alternative to formal school.

100. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

101. In 2000, only 4–5 per cent of primary aged children (both girls and boys) in Afghanistan were estimated to be receiving schooling. Clark, K. 2000. "Afghanistan's Bleak Education Record." BBC News, 27 April. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

102. UNESCO. 2023. "Let Girls and Women in Afghanistan Learn!" 18 January. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

103. UNICEF. 2019. The State of the World's Children 2019. [Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a changing world](#). UNICEF, New York. Accessed on 3 March 2025

104. Ibid.

105. UNESCO. 2023. "Let Girls and Women in Afghanistan Learn!" 18 January. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

106. In Herat province, girls' participation rate was 51 per cent in 2018, 52 per cent in 2019 and 59 per cent in 2020. Omar. 2020. "Herat Witnesses Record Female Participation in Kankor Exam." Salaam Times. 12 August. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

107. UNESCO. 2023. "Let Girls and Women in Afghanistan Learn!" 18 January. As of December 2022, secondary school-aged girls in 21 of 34 provinces had no access to education. Access varied across the 13 remaining provinces. Based on Education Cluster and UNICEF monitoring data per OCHA. 2023. [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

108. Salma Consulting 2024. UN Women Survey 2024. Unpublished.

109. Brunello, G., L. Rocco and M. Eck. 2024. [The Price of Inaction: The Global Private, Fiscal and Social Costs of Children and Youth Not Learning](#). UNESCO. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

In June 2023, the DFA banned international NGOs from implementing community-based education activities for men and women nationwide through which many girls were still receiving non-formal education, requesting their transfer to national NGOs. Particularly among some urban elites, a small proportion of girls continue to pursue self-study online. A lack of certified examinations at secondary and tertiary levels, however, limits the impact of such learning and diminishes the motivation for learners to continue. Frequent power outages, poor Internet connections and fear of discovery are serious impediments to online learning.

An exemption to the ban on education among girls and young women had, until December 2024, allowed tertiary education for midwives and nurses. This avenue was closed on 2 December 2024, with a prohibition on women's education at medical institutes, covering remaining courses available to women such as nursing and midwifery. Before December 2024, the broader education ban had maintained the exclusion of women from attaining the secondary and university education needed to enter highly skilled medical professions, including related to sexual and reproductive health. Until the issuance of this ban, anecdotal reporting had suggested that girls and women were participating in courses from medical institutes as the last remaining formal learning avenue available to them. Women and girls have called for investing in alternative learning opportunities to ensure that they can continue to strengthen their skills and contribute to their families until all learning avenues are reopened.¹¹⁰

Shift towards madrassa schooling

Support among Afghans for education is high. The UN Women survey in 2024 found strong opposition to DFA restrictions on girls' education, including among influential community and religious leaders.¹¹¹ Education was broadly understood as helping people to participate productively in community life and address their economic, social and political challenges. Even parents who themselves had no schooling supported girls' education.

Since August 2021, for many girls and young women, the *madrassa* has been the only option to continue any type of secondary school-level learning. Afghan women's organizations report that *madrassa* learning typically entails two to three hours of Islamic recitation classes per day. It is an addition to, not a replacement for, formal academic learning.¹¹² *Madrassas* are often run by local religious leaders. Reports suggest that they are commonly self-appointed rather than assigned their position on the basis of specific qualifications.¹¹³ The shift to *madrassa* education, under its current model, poses major issues for gender equality and the status of women and girls.

The 2024 UN Women survey showed that women with only *madrassa* education faced more obstacles to their autonomy and empowerment. For example, they had less access to digital communications and financial technology than women with some education (less than grade 12).¹¹⁴ A low 41 per cent of women with only *madrassa* education own their own personal phone, compared to 76 per cent of Afghan women with some formal schooling. No surveyed women with only *madrassa* education reported having access to a bank account or using a mobile money service; this figure increased slightly to 2 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, for women with some formal schooling (grade one onwards in the public and private system). Here, the gender gap continues with 15 per cent of men with *madrassa*-only education having access to a bank account and 3 per cent having used mobile money services.

110. This can be seen in the consultation report from July 2024, as well as earlier consultations, as this request comes up in almost every round of quarterly consultations: UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025

111. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Men were significantly less affected in this regard. The rate of men with some education who had their own mobile telephone was 94 per cent, dropping to 85 per cent for men with only *madrassa* education. Ibid.

YOUNG AFGHAN WOMEN NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

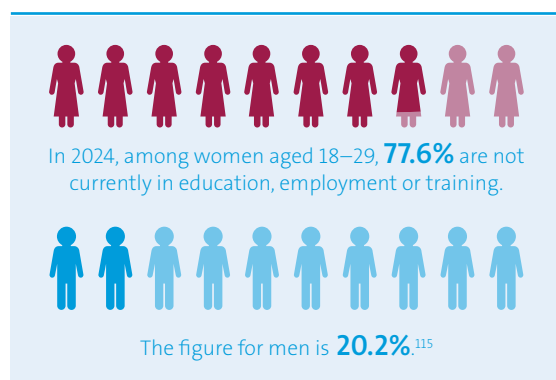


SDG 8.6

Young Afghan women aged 18–29 years old are almost four times more likely than young men to not be engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). The rate for Afghan women is more than twice the global average. The NEET rates offer a stark indicator of the narrow scope of young Afghan women’s opportunities for economic inclusion and resilience, as well as the high pressure imposed on young Afghan men to earn money. Compared to the Afghan population, youth aged 18–29 comprise the greatest share of women and men who are not in any type of learning or employment, followed by the 30–44 age bracket, highlighting the profound crisis facing young Afghan men and women in different yet compounding ways.

This indicator measures vulnerabilities among young women, including unemployment, early school leaving, and exclusion from broader learning and skills-building opportunities beyond formal education, such as training or work experience. Undertaking some type of learning as a young person establishes a strong base for economic inclusion and resilience.

Measure: Percentage of women aged 18–29 years who are not in employment, education or training.



Analysis

Nearly four in five (77.6 per cent) of young Afghan women are not in education, employment or training, compared to one in five (20.2 per cent) of young men.¹¹⁶ Central elements contributing to this situation are: women’s domestic and care responsibilities combined with their often overlooked involvement in income-generation¹¹⁷ (see the section on labour force participation); DFA restrictions on women’s education and employment; gendered cultural constraints on women’s mobility and autonomy and pressure on men to earn money; and a lack of access for women and girls to literacy courses and vocational training, despite broad-based demand.

The number of young Afghan adults aged 15–24 not in education, employment or training in 2021 was 65 per cent of women and 19.5 per cent of men.¹¹⁸ UN Women data found NEET rates of 77.6 per cent among Afghan women aged 18–29 and 20.2 per cent among men of the same age in 2024.¹¹⁹ Although the different age brackets used to measure NEET rates in 2021 and 2024 prevents direct comparison, the data clearly underscore Afghanistan’s stark gender disparity, both nationally and in a global context.

In the absence of reversals in DFA policies, this gender disparity is set to increase further. Factors contributing to this are restrictions on education and employment for women, and an economic crisis

115. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

116. Ibid.

117. Due to strong cultural norms assigning the role of generating income to men, it is often perceived that women are not employed or working when they are supporting a male family member to generate income.

118. World Bank. [World Development Indicators](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

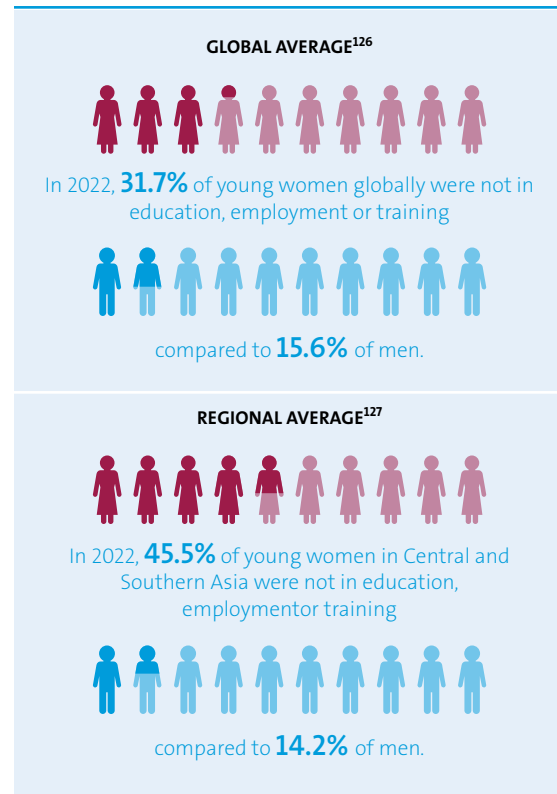
119. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

limiting job opportunities for women and men. Additional drivers for young women and men include shifts in public sector employment (the public sector was previously a large employer), the closure of education providers, a lack of education grants and the unwillingness of employers or institutions to invest in training personnel. These and other issues create and compound myriad challenges for women, including economic dependence on male relatives, increased vulnerability to child and forced marriage, and heightened risk of exploitation and abuse.¹²⁰

The lack of employment, education and training is a pressure point for young Afghan men, given the gendered imperative placed on them to earn money to provide for the family and to afford marriage. Time use data collected by UN Women in 2024 among young men who were NEET demonstrated the importance placed on finding employment, with 86 per cent of men aged 18–29 indicating that they spend “a lot” or “some” of their time looking for work, compared to 57 per cent for the average Afghan man aged 18–60-plus.¹²¹

Young men out of employment and education are particularly vulnerable to social challenges and pressures, including mental health issues and risks related to informal migration and crime. The DFA have targeted this demographic by establishing countrywide networks of councils to train youth leaders and youth associations to “reform their thinking”, without specifying whether this leads to livelihoods or other specific skills.¹²²

Although decreasing in some areas, due to poverty and the concerted efforts by *mullahs* to discourage the practice, a husband-to-be’s payment to the bride-to-be or her family prior to marriage, known as the *mahr*,¹²³ adds financial pressure on young men and boys.¹²⁴ Many Afghan men are migrating to earn money, particularly to Iran and Türkiye, and in many cases, irregularly. The challenges of this outmigration and life abroad can leave them susceptible to violence and drug use.¹²⁵



The migration of young men also heightens vulnerability among young women and girls, as the number of female-headed households increases. In situations where the *mahr* is high, the risk of child marriage rises among girls from economically disadvantaged families, who see it as a means to earn income. A high *mahr* may also create resentment among in-laws, with some evidence indicating a link to domestic violence.¹²⁸

120. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary Report of Country-Wide Women’s Consultations](#). February. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary Report of Countrywide Women’s Consultations](#). April. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

121. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

122. In 2023, the Deputy Minister for Youth presented a plan to train 800 young leaders and conduct an integration programme with 800 youth associations centred on mosques. Van Bijlert, M. 2024. [“How the Emirate Wants to be Perceived: A Closer Look at the Accountability Programme.”](#) Afghanistan Analysts Network, 9 July. Accessed on 3 March 2025.

123. *Mahr* is an amount traditionally paid by the husband to the wife, whereas a bride price or dowry is paid to the father of the bride.

124. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

125. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). “Chapter 5 – Substance Use Among Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants.” In [World Drug Report 2023](#). Vienna: UNODC. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Protection Monitoring Snapshot: Joint Deportation Monitoring – Iran to Afghanistan (January–December 2023). Kabul: UNHCR, January 2024.

126. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women’s empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

127. Ibid.

128. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished. Muzhary, F. 2016. [The Bride Price: The Afghan Tradition of Paying for Wives](#). Government of Afghanistan. Accessed on 3 March 2025. UNICEF. 2018. [Child Marriage in Afghanistan: Changing the Narrative](#). Accessed on 3 March 2025.

LABOUR AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION



Afghan women's **participation in the labour force** (related to SDG 5.4) in 2024 is markedly lower than that of men (24 per cent compared to 89 per cent, respectively). Women who do work often occupy lower-paid, less secure positions, often in informal sectors. DFA decrees and long-standing societal norms have banned women's employment in specific sectors (e.g., NGOs, the United Nations and beauty salons) and restricted their access to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. This economic marginalization is reflected in measurements of economic independence and economic access. Afghan women have limited access to financial resources, such as bank accounts and mobile money services, which are crucial for economic autonomy and resilience. In 2024, only 6.8 per cent of women had a **personal or joint bank account or had used a mobile money service** (SDG 8.10.2), compared to 20.1 per cent of men.¹²⁹

SDG 5.4: By 2030, recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

SDG 8.10: By 2030, strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and to expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.



In 2024, **6.8%** of women has a **personal or joint account**, or had used a **mobile money service**



compared to **20.1%** of men.¹³¹



In 2024, **24.2%** of women are **participating in the workforce**



compared to **88.9%** men.¹³⁰

129. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

130. This value is estimated using data from the UN Women survey, which does not necessarily comply with a standard labour force survey, the sample not necessarily being representative of the real distribution of employment in the population [see Annex III]. These figures provide an indicative update to the labour force participation rate previously measured in 2021 by the International Labour Organization which showed 23.3 per cent of women over the age of 15 years participating in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men.

131. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE AFGHAN LABOUR FORCE



SDG 5.4

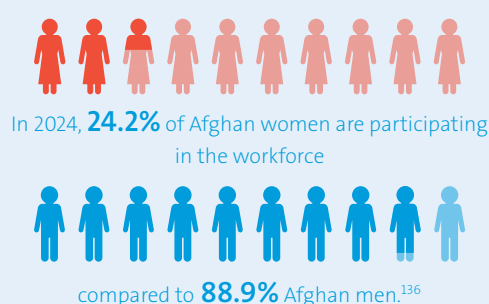
Women's labour force participation - including employed women and women seeking employment - is at an all-time high in Afghanistan, despite restrictions impacting their employment. Ongoing economic and humanitarian crises are driving women into the labour force at unprecedented rates, though men still participate at 3.6 times the rate of women, according to data collected by UN Women in 2024.¹³² Simultaneously, unemployed women seeking employment is increasing disproportionately in comparison to the percentage of employed women. The labour market for women is severely curtailed due to DFA restrictions on them working in sectors that once employed large numbers of women, such as the civil service, national and international NGOs, United Nations entities and beauty salons.

Women's participation in the labour force indicates women's financial autonomy and spotlights the gendered nature of paid and unpaid work. It signals a path towards a greater degree of autonomy and a balance of power at the household level.

Measure: The number of women aged 18–59 who live in a household comprising a couple and at least one child under age 6 and who are in the labour force is divided by the total number of women aged 18–59 who live in a household comprising a couple and at least one child under age 6.¹³³ It is the sum of people of working age who are employed and unemployed but looking for work.

Analysis

The DFA have introduced a patchwork of policies and practices that directly impact women's labour force participation, including bans on: travelling more than 78 kilometres from their home or outside the country without being accompanied by a *mahram*; occupying most government positions; working in NGO offices or for United Nations entities (to date, still with some exemptions in the health and education sectors); working night shifts,¹³⁴ outside medical roles; operating or working in public beauty salons; and teaching in secondary or tertiary education.¹³⁵



Prohibitions on education beyond grade six will significantly impact the flow of skilled professional women into the labour force, as will the ban announced in December 2024 barring women from training at medical institutes.

Data collected by other United Nations agencies reiterates how women's economic participation has shifted significantly since the Taliban takeover. Women immediately lost a great number of jobs, and their employment rate decreased by some 25 per cent between June 2021 and the end of 2022, compared to a decline of 7 per cent among men.¹³⁷ Since then, the ongoing economic crisis has led to mounting financial pressure and a consequent rise in the number of women seeking paid work. Many have been forced to take on jobs that pay less and are typically informal.

132. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

133. The survey asked people aged 18–29 while the original indicator refers to the group aged 15–24. Given sensitivities around collecting survey data from minors, survey data do not reflect data on girls and boys aged 15–17.

134. Although there is no official ban on women working night shifts, a de facto ban is reportedly enforced by the DFA when women are stopped at checkpoints during night hours.

135. UN Women. 2024. [Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed 4 March 2025

136. This value is estimated using data from the UN Women survey, which does not necessarily comply with a standard labour force survey, the sample not necessarily being representative of the real distribution of employment in the population [see Annex III]. These figures provide an indicative update to the labour force participation rate previously measured in 2021 by the International Labour Organization which showed 23.3 per cent of women over the age of 15 years participating in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men.

137. ILO. 2023. [Employment in Afghanistan in 2022: A Rapid Impact Assessment](#). ILO Brief, March. Accessed on 4 March 2025

Based on its 2024 survey data, UN Women estimates that 88.9 per cent of men participated in the labour force compared to 24.2 per cent of women.¹³⁸

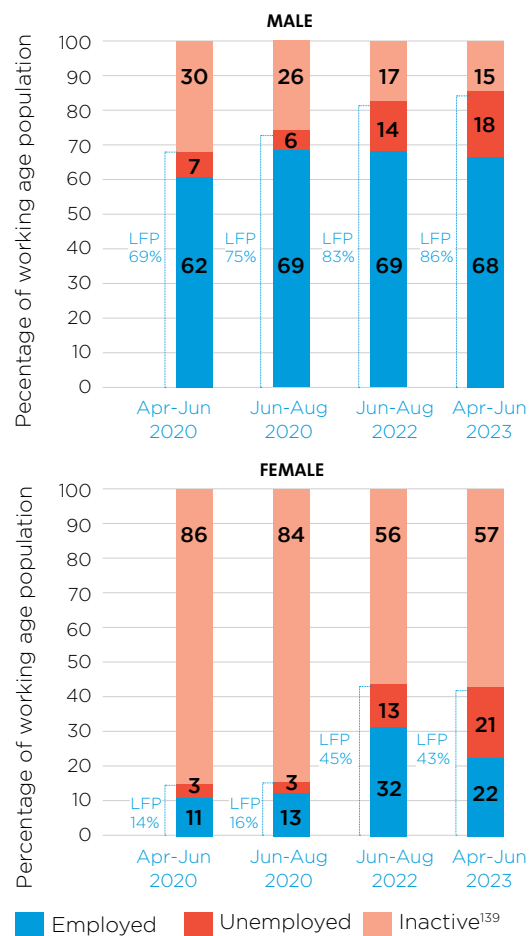
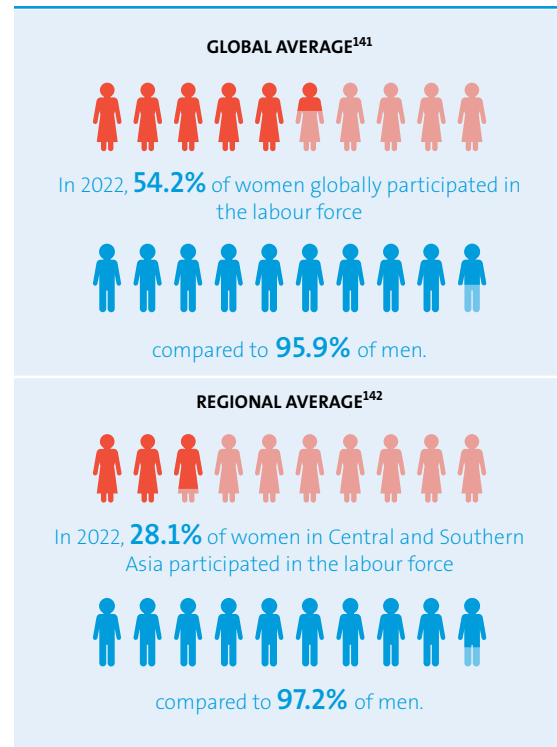


Figure 4 Labour force participation of the working-age population by gender (aged 15-65)¹⁴⁰



The labour force participation rate for Afghan women has fluctuated over time, including the two categories making up labour force participation – unemployed women seeking employment and employed women. World Bank figures show that despite an overall increase in women's labour force participation, unemployed women seeking employment is increasing disproportionately in comparison to the percentage of employed women. In 2016, under the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 19 per cent of women participated in the labour force – 3 per cent were unemployed and seeking work, and 16 per cent were employed.¹⁴³ In 2022, 45 per cent were active in the labour force – 13 per cent were unemployed and seeking work, and 32 per cent were employed (mostly self-employed and working in home-based activities).¹⁴⁴ This reflects a fourfold increase in women unemployed and seeking work and a doubling of employed women.

138. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

139. A person is considered economically inactive if they are not part of the labour force – meaning they are neither employed nor actively seeking work.

140. World Bank, 2023. [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey \(AWMS\), Round 3](#). October. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

141. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

142. Ibid.

143. World Bank. 2022. [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey \(AWMS\), Round 2](#). November. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

144. Ibid.

Despite the overall increase in labour force participation among women, gender dynamics and the ongoing impact of DFA restrictions on women's labour rights have resulted in substantial declines in female employment, with the World Bank reporting that 22 per cent of women aged 15–65 indicated they were employed in 2023 compared to 32 per cent in 2022.¹⁴⁵ Some 21 per cent said that they were unemployed but actively seeking employment, compared to 13 per cent in 2022 (see Figure 5).¹⁴⁶ Despite relatively static overall labour force participation rates in 2022 and 2023, at 45 and 43 per cent, respectively, (see Figure 4) there is a clear trend in women increasingly lacking income-generating employment, with increasing restrictions on women's employment opportunities.

Data collected since 2022 have shown that DFA restrictions made Afghan families less open to female family members being employed outside the home.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, employers tend to prefer men due to the financial, administrative and security challenges imposed on women working. Self-policing by families and employers is powerful. Even without a blanket ban on women's employment, this exacerbates pre-existing gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Some evidence also points to the high prevalence of sexual harassment in workplaces (national and international), although comprehensive post-August 2021 data are not available.¹⁴⁸

Afghanistan has a high child labour rate.¹⁴⁹ On average, more households have boys below 18 working than women above 18 working.¹⁵⁰ This is in line with increased restrictions on women's access to employment due to DFA policies and gender norms that make men and boys the primary breadwinners while women manage the domestic space.¹⁵¹ The protracted humanitarian crisis also drives children into employment.

Understanding of paid labour typically differs among men and women, potentially leading to women underreporting their participation in the labour force. In UN Women's survey, many women, particularly in rural locations, said that while they practised subsistence agriculture or reared livestock, they did not consider this to be a form of employment or income, attributing such contributions to their spouse or male household members.¹⁵² By contrast, many men surveyed described their subsistence agricultural activities as earning income.¹⁵³ The emphasis on men as income earners reduces the likelihood of women self-reporting their own contributions, complicating understanding of women's participation in the paid labour force.

145. World Bank. 2023. [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey \(AWMS\), Round 3](#). October. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

146. Ibid.

147. UN Women. 2024. [Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025. Kabul. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary Report of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan women](#). September 2023. Accessed on 4 March 2025. Gehrig, M. 2022. [Legal and Justice System Changes and Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025. Kabul: UN Women.

148. World Bank. 2023. [Women, Business and the Law 2023: Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025

149. In 2020, data from the National Statistics and Information Authority indicated that over three quarters of children (under 17 years) employed in wage labour (76.1 per cent) had hazardous working conditions, consistent across urban (75.5 per cent) and rural (75.1 per cent) locations, and affecting boys more than girls (78.7 per cent and 69.9 per cent, respectively). The gender gap was greater when urban and rural localities were compared. In urban areas, 80.3 per cent of boys worked in hazardous conditions compared to 52 per cent of girls. In rural locations, the share was 77.9 per cent for boys and 68.4 per cent for girls. The most common hazardous conditions included being exposed to extreme heat or cold (53.8 per cent), exposed to fumes, dust or gas (57.5 per cent), and carrying heavy loads (35.5 per cent). On the whole, girls and boys confronted similar types of risks. Government of Afghanistan. 2021. [Income and Expenditure and Labor Force Surveys Report 2020](#). National Statistics and Information Authority. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

150. The average household in Afghanistan has 6.6 members, of whom 1.6 work (mainly men, 1.19). The remainder of working family members comprise adult women (0.15) and children (in practice, mostly boys: 0.23 compared to only 0.03 of girls). UNDP. 2023. [Afghanistan Socio-Economic Outlook 2023](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

151. Dupree, N. H. 2004. "The Family During Crisis in Afghanistan." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 35(2): 311–331. Salma Consulting. (forthcoming 2025). Community Entry Points for Preventative and Responsive GBV Efforts.

152. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

153. Ibid.

Income generation and employment in rural and urban areas

Labour force participation aims to measure pathways to women's financial autonomy, and the nature of paid and unpaid work. The gendered nature of income-generating activities provides a deeper understanding of the obstacles and opportunities in women's labour force participation. According to UN Women's 2024 survey, in rural areas, 63 per cent of men reported being engaged in income-generating activities, compared to only 9 per cent of women.¹⁵⁴ The same trend was apparent in urban locations, with 68 per cent of men earning income and only 17 per cent of women.¹⁵⁵ The gender gap was less apparent in urban areas, suggesting that women there have more opportunities to earn income via labour outside the home, and that doing so does not transgress the social bounds of gender expectations.¹⁵⁶

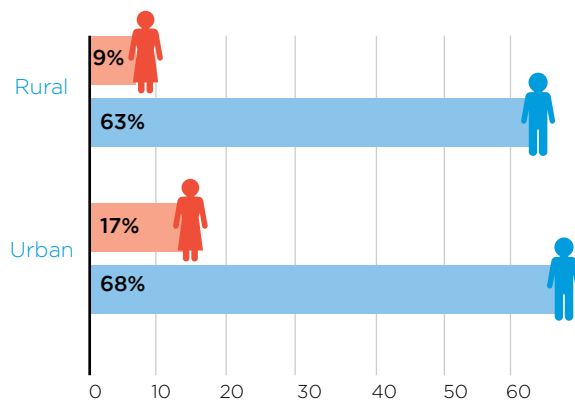


Figure 5 Rural and urban engagement in income-generating activities in Afghanistan, by gender.¹⁵⁷

Gender norms around women earning income along with their lower rates of bank account ownership often mean that their wages are received by male decision-makers in the household. UN Women data collection showed that in 2024, only 5 per cent of women in rural areas could decide how the money they earned would be spent, with this figure increasing to 14 per cent in urban areas.¹⁵⁸ The comparable share for men is 61 per cent in both urban and rural areas.

In rural areas, women are often involved in income generation as supplementary employment, contributing a small amount to overall household finances. According to UN Women's 2024 survey, men (39 per cent) were almost twice as likely as women (20 per cent) to be employed full time.¹⁵⁹ In many cases, women in rural areas reported being socially confined to spaces owned by their family, such as the household or agricultural plots. This tendency, combined with the expectation that women must prioritize domestic duties, reduces the time and space women have for employment and supplementary income generation.

Women's income-generation heavily features home-based activities such as carpet weaving, embroidery and tailoring as well as working in other people's homes such as to wash clothes or clean. Where families own land, women are more likely to engage in agricultural cultivation, typically subsistence, and small-scale livestock-rearing such as poultry farming. It is more common for rural men to be engaged in agriculture on their own or other people's land, with a small proportion also working in casual labour.

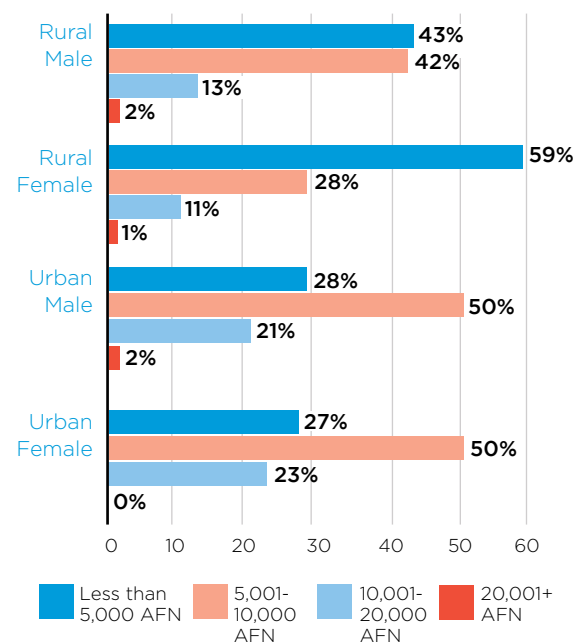


Figure 6 Amount of income in the most recent month of employment for the working population in Afghanistan, by gender and geographic location.¹⁶⁰

154. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

155. Ibid.

156. According to UN Women survey data, men are the primary income earners for the majority of households, irrespective of location. The few rural women who reported being the primary earners had assumed this role either because they were widows or because their spouses or other men in their household were physically unable to be employed. This situation was regularly associated with disability or drug addiction. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

159. Ibid.

160. Ibid.

Income brackets for the survey were aligned with official minimum wage thresholds. According to the [ILO Department of Statistics](#), the statutory nominal gross monthly minimum wage (annual) in Afghanistan was set at AFN 5,500 per month in 2024.

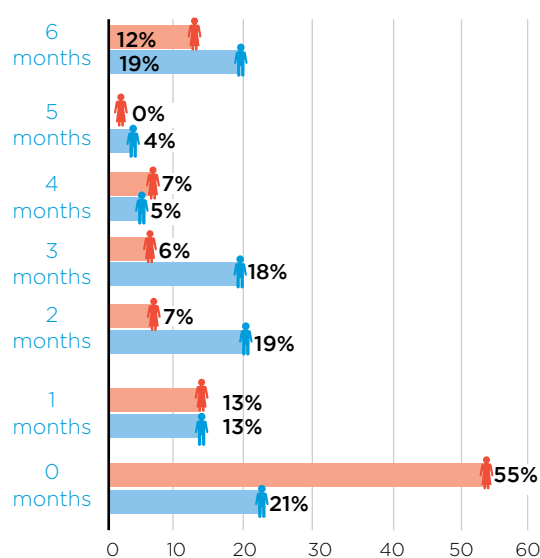


Figure 7 Number of months in the last six months earning a minimum of AFN 10,500 by gender¹⁶¹

In urban locations, UN Women survey results in 2024 found that 50 per cent of all employed women were employed full-time compared to only 37 per cent of employed men, indicating that, when employed, the former are more likely to be in formal employment. Women tended to be employed in administrative positions in private firms or NGO offices and facilities such as schools and health clinics, or to be working from home. In urban areas, men were commonly engaged in varied types of labour, including working for private companies, or as government employees, shopkeepers, tradespeople (such as electricians and blacksmiths), haulers, drivers or tailors.¹⁶²

The median amount of income earned per month was higher in urban than rural areas for women and men. While earnings are low for both men and women, a greater percentage of women in rural areas reported earning less than AFN 5,000 per month (59 per cent, compared to 43 per cent of men). In urban areas, slightly more men reported earning less than AFN 5,000 per month (28 per cent compared to 27 per cent of women), reinforcing the likelihood that women in cities have more formal and full-time positions than men.

For women who work in urban areas restrictions are increasing, imposing obstacles as basic as getting to and from jobs. Their income has also been directly targeted. For example, women previously employed in the public service and still receiving pay have a salary cap of AFN 5,000, codified by the DFA in May 2024.¹⁶³ This codification of pay inequity aligns with anecdotal evidence that men are often paid more for work of equal value.¹⁶⁴

Women in rural areas comprise the lowest income earners, with 59 per cent surveyed indicating that they earn less than AFN 5,000 per month.¹⁶⁵ This low amount reflects the fact that they are paid less for their work than men in rural areas and their urban female counterparts, and that rural women work mainly to supplement family income and not as breadwinners.

In both rural and urban areas, almost 70 per cent of women who work reported not earning a monthly minimum income of AFN 10,500 more than once during the previous six months, according to UN Women's 2024 survey.¹⁶⁶ Income reliability is particularly low for working women with young children living with their spouse, which could, in part, be due to women's greater responsibility for domestic and caregiving chores, leaving their income generation as supplementary to the income of their spouse. Additionally, given that employment is largely understood to be a man's responsibility, women engaging in paid labour are considered as doing so by choice. This limits their ability to use their employment to negotiate better wages or a more equal distribution of unpaid labour. Recent data on monthly income levels per capita by gender and head of household also indicates that members of female-headed households earn less, even though overall employment levels within the family are higher. In 2024, the monthly per capita income for female-headed households stood at AFN 971 with 53 per cent of adults and 11 per cent of children employed, while income levels for male-headed households stood at AFN 1,261 with 44 per cent of adults and 8 per cent of children employed.¹⁶⁷

161. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

162. Ibid.

163. Bjelica, J., and R. Shapour. 2024. [A Pay Cut for Afghan Women Working in the Public Sector: "What Can You Do with 5,000 Afghanis?"](#) Afghanistan Analysts Network. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

164. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

165. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

166. Ibid.

167. UNDP. 2025. [Afghanistan Socio-Economic Review: Fragile Gains, Deepening Subsistence Insecurity](#), 2023-2024. Accessed 20 May 2025.

Unpaid labour and domestic work

Women's unpaid contribution to the household and family members far exceeds that of men. Opportunity costs are significant, as the time women spend on unpaid domestic work limits their ability to pursue paid employment. This in turn hampers their economic empowerment and contribution to the economy of their communities and ultimately their country.

Even where women have paid employment, this does not necessarily decrease their unpaid domestic workload. UN Women survey data elucidated the disparity in the time spent by women and men looking after children: 84 per cent of women spent “a lot” or “some” time looking after children compared to 17 per cent of men. For domestic chores, 74 per cent of women spent “a lot” or “some” of their time on these compared to 3 per cent of men. For mending clothes and doing laundry, 49 per cent of women spent “a lot” or “some” time compared to 1 per cent for men.¹⁶⁸

Similar differences exist between girls and boys,¹⁶⁹ which shows that the socialization of gender roles starts early. Gender differences in time use are even more prevalent among married girls and women. Expectations for daughters-in-law to contribute to the household amplify this dynamic. Data collected by UN Women in 2024 indicated that men were only more likely to undertake unpaid domestic tasks requiring mobility outside the household, such as food shopping. Overall, the data show the impact of longstanding cultural practices around domestic work that are now compounded by DFA policies confining women to the home.¹⁷⁰

Attitudes around women's unpaid and paid labour vary. This was evident from surveying both women and community and religious leaders. Among urban and rural Afghans alike, especially those with

higher levels of education and/or whom had worked during the 2001–2021 period during the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, some described the unequal distribution of domestic labour and social restrictions borne by women as unfair. These restrictions have given men comparatively greater liberty to access public spaces and earn an income.¹⁷¹

Many Afghans also underlined that women face more difficulties in accessing the labour market, but men confront an additional burden and mental stress from being responsible for securing an income in a challenging economic climate.

The gendered distribution of labour has been largely normalized, however, especially in rural areas, in a way that situates men's and women's responsibilities as complementary and important to maintaining family unity and social harmony.¹⁷² Interviews and focus group discussions conducted by UN Women in 2024 found that many men and women in rural areas felt that the disaggregation of roles and responsibilities was complementary and the division of labour was fair. Many women expressed a strong sense of responsibility to maintain the household and care for the family, although this response may also be related to upholding household harmony, since unemployment among men living within the family/household can lead to increased domestic conflict and violence.¹⁷³ This again validates the persistence of norms around the gender division of labour in which men are considered to be the breadwinner.

Efforts to identify and evaluate the dimensions of unpaid care and domestic work represent an essential step towards understanding economic well-being, particularly among women.¹⁷⁴ Failing to recognize the additional labour commonly undertaken by women otherwise results in misunderstanding women's contributions to the economy,¹⁷⁵ household and community.

168. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

169. The 2021 survey by the National Statistics and Information Authority showed that among children aged 5–17, girls did far more domestic work than boys (53.1 per cent compared to 35.6 per cent), although the percentage for both increased with age. Boys were more involved than girls in outdoor activities such as shopping and fetching water and firewood (20 per cent) whereas girls worked more inside the home. Government of Afghanistan. 2021. [Income and Expenditure and Labor Force Surveys Report 2020](#). National Statistics and Information Authority. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

170. A patchwork of DFA policies confine women to the home. These include, most notably, the May 2022 requirement for women to observe “proper *hijab*”, preferably by wearing a *burqa* or not leaving the home without a reason (“the first and best form of observing *hijab*”), and requirements to be accompanied by a *mahram* in various public spaces (including on public transport, when travelling more than 78 kilometres from home, and in certain buildings and centres such as government buildings and some health centres). These come on top of the DFA-fostered pervasive climate of fear among women when it comes to leaving the home.

171. This was evident in interviews and focus group discussions. Salma Consulting. 2024. UN Women 2024 Survey. Unpublished.

172. Shah, R. and S. A. Shah. 2023. [“Preserving Tradition and Embracing Change: A Study on Masculinities in Pashtun Society.”](#) South Asia Chronical 13/2023. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

173. Salma Consulting (forthcoming 2025). Community Entry Points for Preventative and Responsive GBV Efforts.

174. Chiappero-Martinetti, E. 2003. “Unpaid Work and Wellbeing: A Non-monetary Assessment.” In A. Picchio, ed., *Unpaid Work and the Economy: A Gender Analysis of the Standards of Living*.

175. Pateman, C., 2016. Sexual contract. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies*, pp.1-3.

FINANCIAL ACCOUNT OWNERSHIP AMONG AFGHAN WOMEN

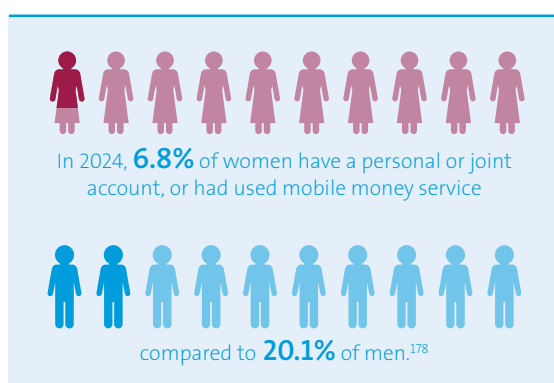


SDG 8.10

Across Afghanistan, account ownership at banks and other financial institutions and the use and awareness of mobile money services are low, among women and men. Women's access to account ownership has steadily increased since 2001, despite a persistent gender gap, yet UN Women data show that in 2024, men are still nearly three times more likely to own a bank account or use mobile money services.¹⁷⁶ Gender inequity is also reflected in levels of mobile phone ownership and internet access, with 91 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women owning their own mobile phone.¹⁷⁷ Massive gender disparities in the ownership of assets and access to loans compound inequities that leave women with extremely low levels of financial resilience.

This indicator reflects women's ability to control their material environment and be economically independent. Access to a bank account gives women the ability to save money securely and is an entry point to use other financial services and develop economic resilience.

Measure: Percentage of the female population aged 18 years and older reporting having an account, alone or jointly with another person, at a bank or other type of financial institution, or reporting personally using a mobile money service in the past 12 months.



Analysis

Generally, Afghan financial and digital capabilities and awareness about mobile money services are quite low.¹⁷⁹ Among Afghan adults, 89.8 per cent (96.1 per cent of women and 83.3 per cent of men) do not have a bank account.¹⁸⁰ Even so, men are more than twice as likely as women to have an account or use mobile money, giving them a greater ability to manage their lives, secure their futures and achieve economic independence.¹⁸¹ Women's restricted engagement in income-generation activities contributes to low levels of account ownership and use of mobile money services. Further, the expectation that women will hand over any money they earn to the head of household, normally a man, reduces the number of women who engage directly with banks and other types of financial institutions. Income-earning women in urban areas tend to have relatively more control over their spending than their rural counterparts.

Low account ownership among women also results from low income levels and restrictions preventing them from independently travelling to banks. Many women reported feeling that they do not have enough money to warrant opening a bank account.¹⁸² They described living week to week, with

176. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

177. Ibid.

178. Ibid.

179. Four mobile money operators in Afghanistan provide services to fewer than 1 per cent of the country's population, mainly in cities. UNCDF and UNDP. 2023. [Interoperability of Financial Services Providers: Afghanistan](#). Accessed 4 March 2025.

180. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

181. Ibid.

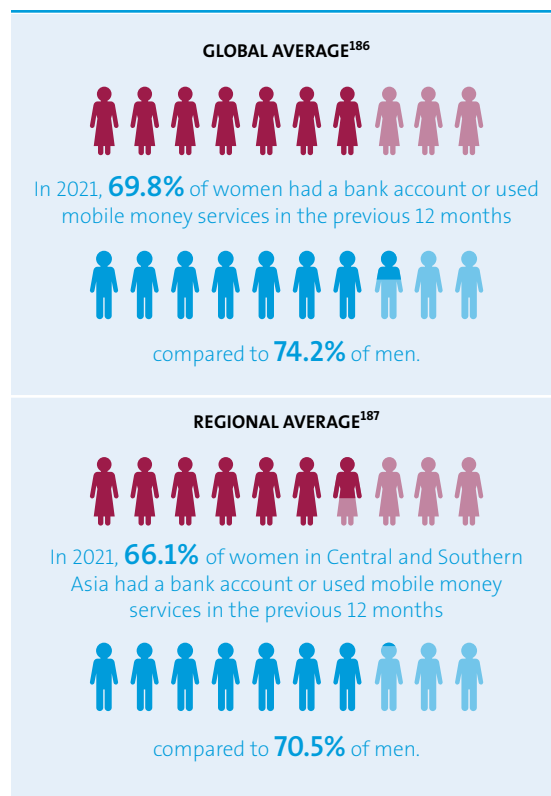
182. Salma Consulting. 2024 (unpublished). "Understanding Women's Perceptions of Mobile Money."

no leftover money to put in an account. Among women surveyed, including businesswomen, income was mainly received in cash, creating additional burdens to travel to the local bank to make deposits. Women running their own businesses were more likely to keep their cash within their home, as they commonly paid their wholesalers and accepted payments in cash.¹⁸³

Education level plays a significant role in women's engagement with the financial system. As education increases, women are more likely to have their own personal bank account, use a joint account or use mobile money services. Among women who indicated having access to a bank account, 48 per cent had an education above grade 12; 64 per cent of this group had their own personal account. In contrast, women with only a madrassa education were the most financially excluded from formal banking; none were using formal banking or mobile money services.¹⁸⁴

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	ACCESS TO BANK ACCOUNT	TYPE OF ACCOUNT FOR THOSE WITH A BANK ACCOUNT		
		PERSONAL ACCOUNT	JOINT ACCOUNT	USED MOBILE MONEY
ABOVE GRADE 12	48%	64%	36%	15%
SOME FORMAL SCHOOLING BUT LESS THAN GRADE 12	2%	100%	0%	3%
MADRASSA ONLY	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2 Impact of education levels on access to financial services among women¹⁸⁵



Mobile telephone and Internet access

Use of mobile money services is intrinsically linked to mobile telephone and internet access. In UN Women's 2024 survey, 60 per cent of women reported having their own phone for personal use. Where a device was shared within a household, the owner generally tended to be a man, with survey data showing that 89 per cent of women who did not own their own phone had access to one from somebody else in their household.

The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law bans the creation and viewing of images of living beings, which is being enforced to search smartphones when they are used in public. In some areas, the DFA forbids vendors from selling SIM cards to women, and, since the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law, there are reports of bans on women buying smartphones.¹⁸⁸

183. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

186. UN Women and UNDP. 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

187. Ibid.

188. Women report in some areas that this is being implemented as a ban on women using smartphones in public. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA (forthcoming). Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women. October 2024.

Mobile telephone access and ownership differs markedly among men and women and between rural and urban areas. Urban women were much more likely to have their own phone (77 per cent) compared to rural women (54.6 per cent). Those in rural locations were more likely to have basic phones; there was greater use of smartphones in urban areas.

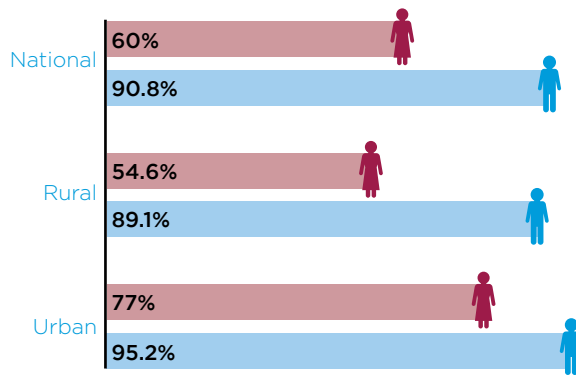


Figure 8 Personal mobile phone ownership in Afghanistan, 2024¹⁸⁹

A further limitation on phone use is that cellular network coverage may not be adequate, particularly in remote and rural areas where infrastructure remains underdeveloped. UN Women's 2024 data collection showed that even in urban centres, unreliable electricity presents a significant barrier. Households may not have consistent access to power to charge phones. In rural areas, some families rely on solar panels or community charging stations, which can be time-consuming and costly to use. Additionally, purchasing phone credits is often considered a luxury for resource-constrained households, many of which prioritize meeting basic needs such as food and shelter over communications expenses.¹⁹⁰

For women, this challenge is compounded by financial dependency. Since men typically manage household finances, women often need to request money from male relatives to purchase phone credit. Such requests may be denied or deprioritized, either due to financial constraints or gendered norms that discourage women's autonomy in communication. This dependency not only restricts women's phone usage but also limits their access to information, educational resources and participation in online spaces, further marginalizing them socially and economically.

Access to financial loans

Gender disparities in financial access, including limited engagement with formal banking systems, create a cycle that excludes women from securing financial resources, for example, by accessing bank loans. Women's ownership of assets and use of loans is substantially lower than that of Afghan men, which limits economic mobility and pathways for women-led businesses to grow. Women who obtained loans for their businesses mostly did so from family (61 per cent), friends (45 per cent) and other businesses (21 per cent), while only a small share received loans from formal financial institutions (5 per cent).¹⁹¹ A significant obstacle to obtaining bank loans is that 70 per cent of these enterprises operate without a licence, in the informal sector, rendering them ineligible for formal financing requiring such documentation.¹⁹² Restrictions on women's mobility and difficulty in obtaining financial guarantors and *shura* approval were also cited as obstacles.

A UN Women survey in April 2024 showed how a lack of collateral (or asset ownership) among Afghan women combines with lower access to employment opportunities to limit the ability of Afghan women to obtain loans.¹⁹³ Another factor is the perception of a higher likelihood of default.¹⁹⁴ Some estimates suggest that less than 5 per cent of land ownership documents include the name of a female family member – a protracted issue that transcends the pre- and post-Taliban takeover.¹⁹⁵ A lack of documentation entrenches women's economic marginalization, limits their ability to be financially resilient, and perpetuates social exclusion and a lack of influence on household and community decision-making.

189. UN Women. 2024. Afghanistan Gender Index data.

190. Ibid.

191. UNDP. 2024. [Listening to Women Entrepreneurs in Afghanistan: Their Struggle and Resilience](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

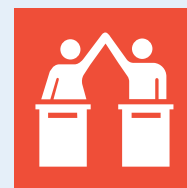
192. Ibid.

193. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

194. Ibid.

195. Housing, Land and Property Task Force Afghanistan. 2020. [A Brief Guide to Women's Land Rights in Afghanistan](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING



Afghanistan now scores zero on two indicators (under target SDG 5.5.1) – the **proportion of seats held by women in local government** (global average of 35.5 per cent) and the **proportion held in the national parliament** (global average of 26.3 per cent). The latter is measured in the current context based on positions in the de facto Cabinet, where 100 per cent of such positions are held by men. Informal ways that women seek to meet the Taliban and create pathways for participation are vital entry points in a context hostile to women’s leadership, but are not considered a substitute for formal participation. Longstanding inequity between men and women in significant leadership roles in the economy, particularly in managerial and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors, has been compounded by over three years of decrees and practices aimed at disempowering women in the public sphere. In 2024, it is estimated that the share of **managerial positions held by women** (SDG 5.5.2) in Afghanistan has significantly decreased, compared to 2020, where women held 5.9 per cent of managerial positions. Women’s lack of formal representation silences their voices and denies them any opportunity to shape policies and seize opportunities to improve their lives and communities. It further removes women leaders as visible indicators of the societal acceptance of women as politically or economically powerful and as role models for girls and other women.

SDG 5.5: By 2030, ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.



In 2020, **5.9%** of **managerial positions** were held by women.¹⁹⁶

Although data were not collected by UN Women’s survey in 2024, this has likely decreased further, given concerted DFA efforts to remove women from decision-making across all sectors, nationwide.

The national parliament in Afghanistan was **dissolved** after the Taliban takeover.



In 2024, **0%** of de facto Cabinet or senior de facto ministry **positions held by women at the national or provincial levels**.¹⁹⁷



In 2024, **0%** of **local government positions** are held by women.¹⁹⁸

196. World Bank. [Afghanistan: Gender Data Portal](#). Accessed on 17 March 2025. This indicator could not be updated from the UN Women 2024 survey results as it relies on administrative records from government or other national bodies that are currently unavailable in Afghanistan. The survey results noted a much higher number (21.12 per cent), likely due to the fact that it was self-reported, allowing women entrepreneurs to self-identify as having a managerial position.

197. Salma Consulting 2024. UN Women Survey 2024. Unpublished.

198. Ibid.

MANAGERIAL POSITIONS HELD BY WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN



SDG 5.5

Already at less than 6 per cent in 2020, the share of women in managerial position will have dropped even lower since August 2021. Restrictions on Afghan women's leadership and employment in middle and senior management roles across the public and private sectors are reversing steady progress made in women's influence and participation in decision-making. Current restrictions impacting women's employment, blocking political participation and curtailing education risk cementing a situation where women lack skills and expertise for key leadership positions, for at least a generation to come.

This indicator complements the labour force participation rate, measuring women's participation in economic decision-making and the gender gap in power and leadership positions. The indicator should be read in conjunction with the women's labour force participation rate and data on women's influence at different levels of decision-making. Women's exclusion from managerial positions has negative effects on economic growth as well as the labour market, worker output, wages and investment in education.



In 2020, **5.9%** of managerial positions were held by women.²⁰⁰

Although data were not collected by UN Women's survey in 2024, this has likely decreased further, given concerted DFA efforts to remove women from decision-making across all sectors, nationwide.

Measure: The proportion of managerial positions held by women, expressed as a percentage of total managerial positions.

Analysis

Measured by reviewing administrative records from government bodies, it was not possible to officially update this indicator in 2024. Evidence does, however, show that since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, women have been removed and banned from working on multiple levels and in various sectors. In the non-governmental arena, where women have historically had a strong leadership presence, they have been banned from working and prohibited from holding leadership roles such as head of organization or board member.¹⁹⁹

In government positions, women have been removed, suspended or left the civil service; previously, they made up between 9 and 12 per cent of top leadership positions in the public sector.²⁰¹ The number of women still working in the civil service is unknown, albeit they are reportedly limited to positions that men cannot fill, such as in health and education and some security roles, including at the airport.²⁰²

The private sector in Afghanistan, especially women-owned businesses, is often seen as an entry point for women under the current restrictions. Since August 2021, there have been reports of an uptick in the percentage of women establishing their own businesses through home-based manufacturing or production, though self-employment at this scale would not be considered a managerial position contributing to closing the gender gap on power and

199. UN Women. 2024. [Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed 4 March 2025

200. World Bank. [Afghanistan: Gender Data Portal](#). Accessed on 17 March 2025. This indicator could not be updated from the UN Women 2024 survey results as it relies on administrative records from government or other national bodies that are currently unavailable in Afghanistan. The survey results noted a much higher number (21.12 per cent), likely due to the fact that it was self-reported, allowing women entrepreneurs to self-identify as having a managerial position.

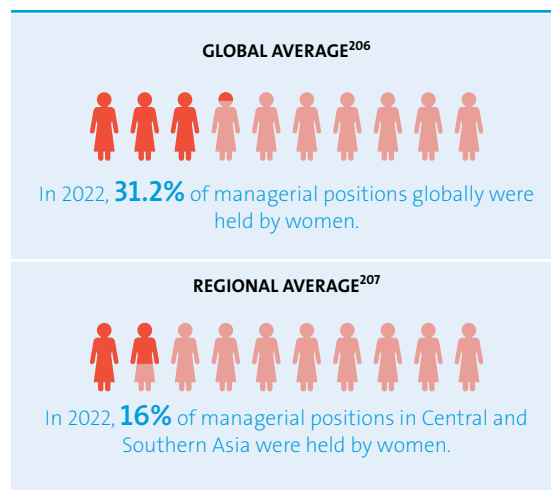
201. Government of Afghanistan. 2021. Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2020. Issue No. 44. April. National Statistics and Information Authority.

202. In 2023, the de facto Ministry of Economy stated that "92,000 women work in the education sector and 14,000 in the health sector, they work in airports, banks." Van Bijlert, M. 2024. ["How the Emirate Wants to be Perceived: A Closer Look at the Accountability Programme."](#) Afghanistan Analysts Network, 9 July. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

leadership positions in the workforce.²⁰³ Home-based economic activities have emerged largely in response to the deteriorating economic climate and restrictions prevent women from holding a managerial position that can contribute to closing the gender gap on power and leadership positions in the workforce.

Even those opportunities that remain for women to engage in economic activities are subject to heavy restrictions. Despite a reportedly more conducive business environment in 2024 than 2023 (in large part due to donor assistance and higher demand for homemade items), women-led small and medium-sized enterprises reported that gender-based discrimination, coupled with DFA restrictions, are major impediments to employment and mobility.²⁰⁴ Together with economic uncertainty, gender-based discriminatory policies prevent women from accessing suppliers and markets (in some areas, women may only sell goods in women-only markets) and dampen women's economic participation and export capacity. As noted in the section on labour force participation, many women-led enterprises are unlicensed and reliant on male relatives to access financing, suppliers and markets. In the current political climate, despite the expansion of women-led businesses, economic power and business growth (e.g., moving from a smaller to a larger enterprise) remain out of reach for most women.

Women face severe challenges in holding leadership roles in the private sector, especially beyond small and medium-sized enterprises. Various restrictions targeting women's leadership in the private sector are enforced by the DFA. They include bans on: women being in roles of authority in the media, such as by working as news presenters or appearing as television programme guests;²⁰⁵ women-led businesses such as beauty parlours; and the renewal of licences, including business licences and those needed to practise law. Combined, these policies leave women with limited opportunities to hold leadership and senior management roles in larger businesses or in non-women-led small and medium-sized enterprises.



This targeting of women's leadership in the private sector aligns closely with a deterioration in women's influence and authority from the household and community level to the provincial and national level. Women have described their loss of influence on decision-making as due to DFA policies and accompanying conservative shifts in social norms.²⁰⁸ Over the long term, the decline in women holding managerial roles in the private sector and diminishing education levels and employment experience due to DFA restrictions will likely further consolidate social norms that view women as lacking the capacity to lead – whether in the economic, social or political realm.

203. Particularly noticeable in rural areas, the share of women employed in manufacturing (this includes home-based production) increased from 15 per cent in 2020 (April to June) to 39 per cent in 2023 (corresponding months). In tandem, the share of employment in agriculture declined. Almost all women in manufacturing work out of their homes; home-based work represents 96 per cent of total employment in manufacturing. World Bank, 2023. [Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey \(AWMS\), Round 3](#). October. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

204. UNDP. 2024. [Listening to Women Entrepreneurs in Afghanistan: Their Struggle and Resilience](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

205. Despite being targeted to the media sector, the highly visible nature of its effects (removing women from public view) poses a risk of knock-on effects on women's leadership in all sectors. Gehrig, M. 2022. [Brief No. 1: Media Restrictions and the Implications for Gender Equality in Afghanistan](#). UN Women Thematic Briefing Series. UN Women and the Athena Consortium. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

206. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

207. Ibid.

208. The consultations jointly conducted by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA have clearly demonstrated this deterioration. See the reports on these periodic consultations: [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#) and [August 2022](#).

PARLIAMENTARY SEATS HELD BY WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN



SDG 5.5

Currently, Afghanistan does not have a democratic government with a parliament that represents constituencies across the country. Following the Taliban's takeover, a small, exclusive group of Taliban men form the de facto Cabinet. Women have been wholly excluded from all levels of political decision-making, and formal channels for women to convey their views to Taliban leadership do not exist. While nascent entry points to meet directly with the Taliban exist for some women, the Taliban have yet to endorse or put in place any form of gender-inclusive governance.

This indicator measures women's access to national leadership positions. To obtain a full picture of women's representation nationwide, it should be considered with the indicator on women's share of seats in local government. Taken together, the components of women's political representation comprise a key measure of gender equality in participation and women's right to be equally heard, consulted and represented.

Measure: The proportion of seats in the national parliament held by women expressed as a percentage of the total number of parliamentary seats.

The national parliament in Afghanistan was **dissolved** after the Taliban takeover.



In 2024, **0%** of de facto Cabinet or senior de facto ministry positions are held by women at the national or provincial levels.²⁰⁹

Analysis

Women do not feature in the Taliban's de facto Cabinet – the proxy measure used to assess women's national political participation.²¹⁰ The current Taliban worldview is a predictable continuation of their beliefs about women's roles in political and public life. The total absence of women political representatives is in line with the Taliban leadership's consistent erasure of women's presence in public and political life that has been well documented since the 1990s. During their first rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban banned women from taking part in politics. Prior to 2021, women parliamentarians, political leaders and electoral candidates as well as female staff in electoral offices and female voters faced targeted attacks and threats.²¹¹

Since 2021, the DFA have systematically dismantled the women's rights architecture, including ending gender quotas for women in politics, dismantling the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and abolishing the law seeking to end violence against women. In parallel, they have codified violations of women's rights and freedoms, effectively solidifying the comprehensive exclusion of women from public life, and leadership and decision-making positions across all levels of society. On one of the few times that the DFA have spoken of women's involvement in political decision-making, they suggested that men sufficiently represent the interests of Afghan women.²¹² There is currently no pathway for the return of women to

209. Salma Consulting 2024. UN Women Survey 2024. Unpublished.

210. United Nations. 2022. [The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General](#). UN General Assembly, 76th session, Security Council, A/76/667–S/2022/64. 28 January 2022.

211. Thompson, R. J. 2015. "Dying to Lead: Women Leaders in Afghanistan During the 2021-2014 Transition and Beyond." In *Women and Leadership Around the World*. Madsen, S. R., and others. 2015. International Leadership Association Series, pp. 3-22; Nemat, O. A. 2015. [Women and the Elections: Facilitating and Hindering Factors in the Upcoming Parliamentary Elections](#). Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

212. During a 2022 national meeting with religious scholars and tribal leaders, the de facto deputy prime minister reportedly stated that men inherently represent the interests of their female family members. "The women are our mothers, sisters, we respect them a lot, when their sons are in the gathering it means they are also involved, in a way, in the gathering." Reuters. 2022. [Men Will Represent Women at Gathering for National Unity – Taliban Leader](#). 29 June. Accessed on 4 March 2025

political and public life. Equally, the Taliban have yet to take any tangible steps to indicate that they will reintroduce women to the public sphere.

The removal of women from political positions in 2021 came after 20 years of hard-fought efforts to increase participation. In line with the special measures prescribed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Afghanistan ratified in 2003, the 2004 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan enshrined quotas for women to hold seats in Parliament, at 27 per cent for the lower house.

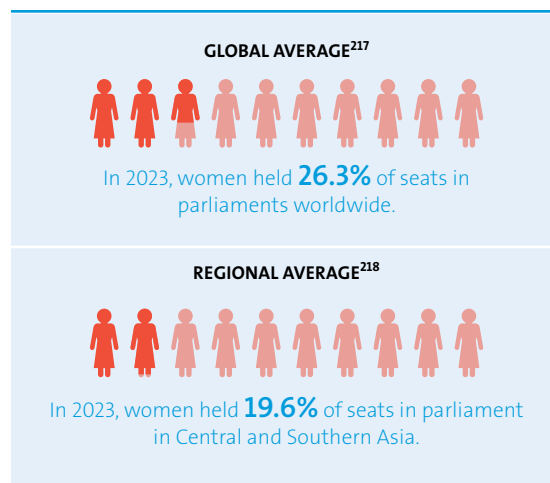
	2010	2015	2021 (UP TO 15 AUGUST)	2024
WOMEN GOVERNORS	1	2**	1*	0
WOMEN DEPUTY GOVERNORS	0	1	25	0

* Appointed for Daykundi on 1 April 2021 but replaced by a male governor on 13 July 2021.

** Female governors for Ghor and Daykundi had short terms of six month and two years, respectively.

Table 3 Women as provincial governors and deputy governors²¹³

Despite substantial challenges in highly patriarchal political institutions, the quotas and other efforts significantly increased women's presence in public life. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, more than 400 female candidates ran for office and over 3 million women registered to vote.²¹⁴ *Loya jirgas* also included women,²¹⁵ with the 2019 *loya jirga* having a 30 per cent quota for their participation.²¹⁶



At the 2020 *loya jirga*, 700 of 3,000 delegates were women (23 per cent).²¹⁹ These developments did not solve all underlying causes of women's structural exclusion in political life as they did not extend to the most remote parts of the country. But they nevertheless provided vital entry points to accelerate women's visibility and presence in leadership positions and supported an architecture more open to addressing women's political aspirations.

During the intra-Afghan talks prior to 2021, the Taliban made ambiguous promises to respect women's rights "within the limits of Islamic *sharia*".²²⁰ Over three years into their rule, it has become clear that women's inclusion in decision-making at any level falls outside their interpretation of this framework. Despite an absence of parliamentary or inclusive governance or civil society structures for women to participate, their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in internationally led processes is enshrined clearly in international policy documents. The overarching goals of such processes are in line with the United Nations Security Council women, peace and security agenda,²²¹ the UNAMA mandate²²² and key United Nations policy documents. The latter

213. United Nations Country Team Afghanistan. 2021. Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis. Unpublished.

214. Bjelica, J., and R. Soroush. 2018. [Afghanistan Elections Conundrum \(20\): Women Candidates Going Against the Grain](#). Issues Paper, 19 October. Afghanistan Analysts Network. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

215. Hassan, P. 2010. [The Afghan Peace Jirga: Ensuring Women Are at the Peace Table](#). Peacebrief. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace.

216. TOLONews. 2019. ["Ghani Wants Women's Active Role in Peace Jirga."](#) 23 April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

217. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

218. Ibid.

219. Ruttig, T., A. Y. Adili and O. Ali. 2020. [Doors Opened for Direct Talks with the Taliban: The Results of the Loya Jirga on Prisoners and Peace](#). Afghan Analysts Network, 12 August.

220. Rubin, B., R. 2020. [Constitutional Issues in the Afghan Peace Negotiations: Process and Substance](#). Washington DC.: United States Institute of Peace.

221. For policy documents and more information detailing the United Nations commitment to the women, peace and security agenda, see: United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. [Gender, Women, Peace and Security](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

222. See more information on the [mandate](#) of UNAMA. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

comprise the 2023 Independent Assessment²²³ by the Special Coordinator for Afghanistan appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General. The subsequent Security Council resolution 2721 also clearly emphasizes the importance of women's participation in international discussions.²²⁴ Clear language on women's participation has yet to materialize in practice. Afghan women continue to draw attention to their protracted exclusion in international discussion, a trend that pre-dates August 2021.²²⁵

Despite their near erasure from public and political life, Afghan women are still advocating for inclusive governance and finding entry points to meet the Taliban to raise their concerns on a range of issues, at the national and subnational levels. While some Afghan women are engaging the Taliban, it does not signal or equate recognition or endorsement of the Taliban. It is about necessity and survival. Afghan women are also working at the local level to address the humanitarian needs of women, run businesses, find pathways for alternative learning and document the situation. While Afghan women are finding ways to participate, it does come at great personal risk as reprisals, including threats and intimidation of families and extended networks, have been reported in the past three years.

Afghan women – inside and outside the country – continue to call on the international community to prioritize the meaningful participation of Afghan women in all international forums.²²⁶ Afghan women are also spearheading accountability discussions, including calling for the codification of gender apartheid.²²⁷ Since fleeing Afghanistan in August 2021, former Afghan women leaders have set up networks and platforms to continue contributing to policy discussions, albeit from outside the country.

Alongside these international forums, nascent efforts are underway to build more coherent pathways for Afghan women's political engagement, including on critical topics such as climate change.²²⁸ Existing human rights mechanisms are also providing avenues for engagement with the DFA on violations of CEDAW and other treaties enshrining human rights standards. These initiatives enable them to engage in policy discussions, influence international discourse on Afghan women's rights, and provide strategic inputs on humanitarian and development aid efforts. Operating from exile, they leverage digital platforms and international partnerships to amplify their voices and put key policy issues around Afghan women's rights on the global agenda.²²⁹ These platforms have become crucial avenues for Afghan women to advocate for their rights, particularly in response to the Taliban's removal of their political influence and the ongoing women's rights crisis in Afghanistan.

Women's political participation and legislative equality

The current restrictions impacting women and girls in Afghanistan are an extreme example of how women's absence in political life and governance is deeply intertwined with the growth of discriminatory laws that codify their removal in other spheres of economic, social and cultural life. The misogynistic logic driving the removal of women from political life has served as the basis of introducing decrees excluding women from public life more broadly, including banning women from public spaces (e.g., parks, gyms), workplaces (e.g., in the NGO sector, for the United Nations and in beauty salons) and even their voices through the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.²³⁰

223. See United Nations Security Council. 2023. [Letter Dated 8 November 2023 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council](#). S/2023/856. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

224. The UNAMA mandate was renewed by [Security Council resolution 2678](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

225. Women were present at only 15 of the 67 (approx. 22 per cent) high-level formal or informal peace talks that took place in Afghanistan between 2000 and 2005. Oxfam. 2021. ["Leading the Way": Women driving peace and security in Afghanistan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen](#). Oxfam Briefing Paper. January 2021. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

226. This has been a consistent request by Afghan women in consultations jointly conducted by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. See the reports on these consultations: [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#) and [August 2022](#).

227. Kelly, A., 'Afghan women fight to hold Taliban to account over gender apartheid,' 9 October 2024, The Guardian.

228. AMPLIFY Afghan Women & Monash Gender Peace and Security Centre. 2022. [Afghan women at the forefront of climate change](#).

229. UN Women. 2024. [Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed 4 March 2025.

230. This is captured across the consultations conducted by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. See the reports on these consultations: [April 2024](#), [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#) and [August 2022](#).

The impact of women's political participation is increasingly documented globally, with growing evidence that women's leadership improves political decision-making.²³¹ Evidence shows that a higher rate of women's political representation, for example, is closely linked to legal advances supporting equality in economic opportunities²³² (see the box on Afghanistan's score on the Women, Business and the Law Index below).

Links between women's political participation and economic empowerment further support the quality of peace processes and democratic governance, including through putting in place laws and legislation to advance gender equality and protect women. Recent analysis on the increasing marginalization of women in public life, including their absence from parliament, and the intensification of traditional gender roles suggests these are early warning signs of the potential for violent conflict.²³³ Similar evidence exists on women's economic empowerment. States with 10 per cent of women in the labour force are nearly 30 times more likely to experience internal conflict than those with 40 per cent of women in the labour force.²³⁴ With no women in parliament, Afghanistan is missing the benefits that women in public and political decision-making bring to a country's development, peace and stability.



231. Chattopadhyay, R., and E. Duflo. 2004. "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72(5): 1409–1443. K. A. Bratton and L. P. Ray. 2002. "Descriptive Representation: Policy Outcomes and Municipal Day-care Coverage in Norway," *American Journal of Political Science* 46(2): 428–437.

232. Oliver Wyman Forum. 2023. "[Representation Matters: Women Political Leaders](#)". Accessed on 4 March 2025.

233. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, immediately before the conflict, the number of women in Parliament fell from above 25 per cent to below 6 per cent. Kapur, B., and M. Rees. 2018. "WPS and Conflict Prevention." In J. Ture and S. Davies, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*.

234. This calculation controls for other possible causes of internal conflict. Caprioli, M. 2005. "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 49(2): 161–178.

Afghanistan and the Women, Business and the Law Index²³⁵

The scores of Afghanistan on the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Index highlight a deteriorating legal environment for women, marked by the dismantling of supportive frameworks and the introduction of discriminatory measures. Scores for legal frameworks on women's economic empowerment are significantly lower than global and regional averages. Regional averages are more than twice the scores in Afghanistan, and global averages are three times higher.

Scores for Afghanistan do not wholly account for the Taliban's verbal dissolution of the pre-August 2021 legal framework and the implementation of a patchwork of individual decrees and policies depriving women of their fundamental rights. A full reckoning would likely further reduce the scores.

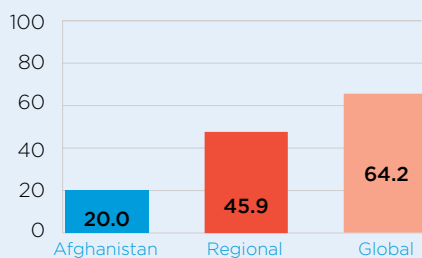


Figure 9 Legal frameworks enshrining women's economic rights including Afghanistan's score²³⁶

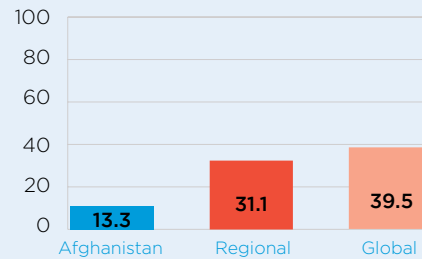


Figure 10 Supplementary frameworks to implement policies on women's economic rights including Afghanistan's score²³⁷

Globally, lawmaking needs women's participation to achieve legal equality. This is shown by evidence that having more women parliamentarians leads to progressive legislation on issues such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender equality and electoral reform.

Unsurprisingly, such measures positively impact economic progress. A 10 per cent increase in women's representation in parliament leads to a 0.74 per cent increase in growth in gross domestic product.²³⁸ The ongoing exclusion of Afghan women from political decision-making therefore will have major impacts on the country's economic future.

235. Women, Business and the Law measures the enabling environment for women's economic opportunity. It analyzes laws — de jure — and examines the existence of frameworks supporting implementation of the law and gauges experts' opinions on the outcome of the law for women — de facto. World Bank. [Women, Business and the Law 2024 Data](#). Accessed on 17 March 2025.

236. Legal frameworks measure the state of the law within a given economy in relation to a specific right.

237. Supportive frameworks capture the existence of policy mechanisms to implement rights.

238. Mirziyoyeva, Z., Salahodjaev, R. 2023. [Does representation of women in parliament promote economic growth? Considering evidence from Europe and Central Asia](#). Frontiers in Political Science, volume 5.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SEATS HELD BY WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN



Women have been removed from government seats at all levels since August 2021, including at the local level. Local DFA officials and avenues to influence decision-making are inaccessible to most Afghan women and men. This exclusion varies by ethnicity and geographic location, among other factors. Women's access to community decision-making is limited by social norms and gendered restrictions imposed by the DFA. These factors constrict their mobility, perceived authority and influence. Women must often rely on male family members to advocate on their behalf with community leaders and the DFA.

This indicator measures women's access to local leadership positions and should be read in conjunction with the indicator on the share of parliamentary seats held by women. Taken together, the components of women's political representation comprise a key measure of gender equality in participation and women's right to be equally heard, consulted and represented.



In 2024, **0%** of local government positions are held by women.²⁴¹

Measure: The proportion of elected positions held by women in the legislative or deliberative bodies of local government, expressed as a percentage of total elected positions in those bodies.

Analysis

The DFA have wholly excluded women from holding positions at the local, provincial and national levels, leaving them unrepresented among officials making decisions impacting their lives.²³⁹ There are no women governors or local DFA officials. The removal of women from local governance structures and the dissolution of community decision-making bodies reflect a significant shift since 2020. Although exact figures on local government structures are unavailable, women, at that point, made up 26 per cent of civil service employees across the country and 9 to 12 per cent of senior leaders across various ministries.²⁴⁰

De facto authorities at the local and national levels are largely unwilling to engage directly with women or hear about issues specifically affecting them, with some expressing open hostility to such practices.²⁴² Between January and March 2024, however, 80 per cent of women surveyed by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA had not engaged once with local authorities on issues important to them.²⁴³ Women noted that they had been denied entry to de facto ministry and department buildings and that DFA officials refused to see them.

Some variation does exist, although it is the exception and not the norm. For example, while some DFA leaders may meet certain Afghan women, on specific issues, there is no Taliban-endorsed or accepted nationwide mechanism to bring women meaningfully into decisions, directly or indirectly. Select women have been able to negotiate pathways to directly advocate for issues affecting their businesses or organizations.

239. United Nations. 2022. [The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General](#). UN General Assembly, 76th session, Security Council, A/76/667–S/2022/64. 28 January 2022.

240. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). February. Accessed on 4 March 2025. Some women noted how DFA officials who do meet with them have faced repercussions for doing so. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

241. Salma Consulting 2024. UN Women Survey 2024. Unpublished.

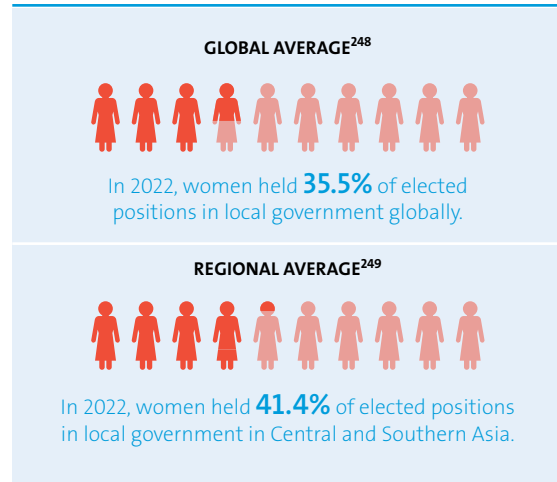
242. Ibid.

243. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary Report of Countrywide Women's Consultations](#). April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

Ethnicity and gender intersect, where women (and men) from marginalized groups – such as the Hazaras, – are even more excluded from access to or influence over decision-makers.²⁴⁴ Afghan men have noted that raising issues perceived as involving women’s rights, even by community or religious leaders, is seen as a form of opposition to the DFA, making it difficult to broach these issues.²⁴⁵

Community decision-making bodies

Multiple permutations and combinations of local decision-making bodies exist across Afghanistan. For example, community councils or local *shuras* hold meetings where community members can discuss the implementation of customary law and find resolutions guided by local interpretations of Islam and cultural traditions. Although these forums are heavily male-dominated, from 2001 to 2021, under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, women took part in the process as equal participation was mandated.²⁴⁶ Although the implementation of women’s mandated role was not always successful – decisions were often still made by men – women were recognized as influential in decision-making and had an avenue to affect important issues. They also played roles in school management *shuras*, supporting and advocating for girls’ education.²⁴⁷ Importantly, these roles gave women in communities and women’s organizations a clear pathway for advocacy and organizing.



Since the Taliban takeover, community decision-making bodies have largely become obsolete or been intentionally dismantled. Such bodies are increasingly ignored by the DFA in favour of hand-picked village heads – all men.²⁵⁰ On 23 May 2024, the community development councils, previously instrumental in bringing community representation into development projects and decision-making, were dissolved by the de facto Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.²⁵¹

244. In the central highlands, a group of participants (76 per cent Hazara and 24 per cent Tajik) reported particularly low engagement with the DFA; 98 per cent of respondents indicated not once engaging with the DFA on issues important to them between January and March 2024. Ibid.

245. Ibid.

246. Bjelica, J. 2024. [“The Fate of the Village Councils: The Emirate’s Effort to Institute Hegemony over Rural Afghanistan.”](#) Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

247. Barekai, S. 2014. [“Women’s Participation in School Management Shuras in Afghanistan: Obstacles and Opportunities for Women’s Involvement in Government Schools in Kabul City.”](#) Karlstads University. Accessed on 4 March 2025

248. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women’s empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

249. Ibid.

250. Their dissolution cited a verbal directive from the Taliban supreme leader. Bjelica, J. 2024. [“The Fate of the Village Councils: The Emirate’s Effort to Institute Hegemony over Rural Afghanistan.”](#) Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

251. Ibid.

Community decision-making bodies that continue to exist have anecdotally seen a considerable decrease in the number of women supporting local *shura* activities. Women have noted their waning influence:²⁵² in April 2024, only 2 per cent of women consulted indicated having any influence on community decision-making bodies compared with 18 per cent of men.²⁵³ This marked a decrease from 32 per cent in January 2023.²⁵⁴

The segregation of men and women often keeps women out of decision-making spaces as they are inherently male dominated. This reduces their ability to provide inputs and negotiate beneficial outcomes for themselves.²⁵⁵ The large difference in mosque attendance between men²⁵⁶ and women, signifies women's more limited access to informal decision-making spaces as well. While men spend a significant amount of time attending mosques, some 94 per cent of women said they "never" spent time at mosques and none indicated that they spent "a lot" of time at mosques. Bans related to public spaces also cut off women from vital informal spaces to come together.

With women excluded from formal and informal public meetings and unable to directly engage with de facto local authorities of any kind, they are forced to rely on male family and community members to advocate on their behalf. This risks normalizing their erasure from multiple levels of decision-making.



252. Community decision-making bodies have also largely become obsolete and are increasingly ignored by the DFA in favour of handpicked village heads. On 23 March 2024, the community development councils were dissolved by the de facto Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, citing a verbal directive from the Taliban supreme leader. Bjelica, J. 2024. [“The Fate of the Village Councils: The Emirate’s Effort to Institute Hegemony over Rural Afghanistan.”](#) Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network. Barekai, S. 2014. [“Women’s Participation in School Management Shuras in Afghanistan: Obstacles and Opportunities for Women’s Involvement in Government Schools in Kabul City.”](#) Karlstads University. Accessed on 4 March 2025

253. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

254. Ibid.

255. Azarbajani-Moghaddam, S. 2012. A Study of Gender Equity Through the National Solidarity Programme Community Development Councils. Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees. Isaqzai, S; 2021. [School Management Shura for Girls’ Education in Afghanistan](#). Doctoral thesis. University of Florida.

256. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). April. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE



Afghan women face **physical and sexual violence from intimate partners** at rates nearly three times higher than the global average; in 2018, 34.7 per cent reported being subject to such violence in the preceding 12 months (SDG 5.2.1), compared to 13 per cent globally. Practices such as honour killings, forced and child marriages, and the exchange of women and girls in dispute resolutions (*baad*) exacerbate gender-based violence. This severely impacts the abilities of women and girls to freely make decisions and live autonomously, affecting all dimensions of gender equality. A lack of legal protection and support systems and discriminatory policies institutionalized by the DFA make women's and girls' vulnerability to gender-based violence and its consequences even worse.

SDG 5.2: By 2030, eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.



In 2018, **34.7%** of Afghan women reported being subject to **intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence** in the preceding 12 months.²⁵⁷

257. UNDESA. [UNSDG Database](#). Accessed on 13 June 2025.

AFGHAN WOMEN AND GIRLS SUBJECTED TO PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE



SDG 5.2

The most recent data collected on this indicator, in 2018, showed that 34.7 per cent of Afghan women experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the preceding 12 months. This figure highlights the profound gender inequalities and systemic women's rights violations at work within Afghanistan. Since the Taliban takeover in 2021, risk factors for gender-based violence, including violence against women, have increased due to deepening economic hardship, restrictions on the education of girls, and the dismantling of legal protections and support systems for ending violence against women. Due to sensitivities in the current context, it is not possible to collect data on gender-based or intimate partner violence, an indication of the DFA posture on these issues.

This indicator measures women's and girls' freedom from violence that is often a direct expression of unequal power relations and domination by men perpetuating gender inequalities. Physical and sexual violence have broad implications for women's empowerment, including but also extending beyond their bodily integrity.



In 2018, **34.7%** of Afghan women reported being subject to intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence in the preceding 12 months.²⁵⁹

Measure: The proportion of Afghan women aged 15 to 49 years who report having been subjected to one or more acts of physical violence or sexual violence, or both, by a current or former husband or male intimate partner within the preceding 12 months.

Analysis

Gender-based violence against women and girls is widespread but underreported – a longstanding issue in Afghanistan. Specific groups of women are at higher risk, including women-headed households, widows, girls forced into child marriage, internally displaced and returnee women, women living with disabilities, and women from religious, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities.²⁵⁸

According to the most recent data, in 2018, 34.7 per cent of ever-married Afghan women had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in the previous 12 months. In data collected in 2015, 56 per cent had experienced such violence at least once since age 15, with those who reported such violence in the preceding 12 months experiencing it either “often” (36 per cent) or “sometimes” (16 per cent).²⁶⁰ Significant geographic variations exist, with rates higher among women in rural areas (56 per cent) than in urban areas (43 per cent).²⁶¹ Women's reports of physical violence in particular vary greatly by province, with comparatively low levels in Helmand (6 per cent) and Badakhshan (7 per cent) and very high levels in Ghor (93 per cent) and Herat (91 per cent).²⁶²

Violence within marital homes is justified by norms that uphold male dominance and power. Child marriage is associated with an increased likelihood of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual and emotional violence by a spouse or the marital family.²⁶³ Social norms around child marriage are

258. Protection Cluster. 2024. [Afghanistan Protection Analysis: Update on Protracted-Crisis and Climate-Related Protection Risks Trends](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

259. UNDESA. [UNSDG Database](#). Accessed on 13 June 2025.

260. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

261. Ibid.

262. Ibid.

263. Safi, M., Browne, E., Kamninga T. and Khan, A. 2024. [Changing social norms around age of marriage in Afghanistan: data on repression and resistance under the Taliban](#). ODI Report. London: ODI.

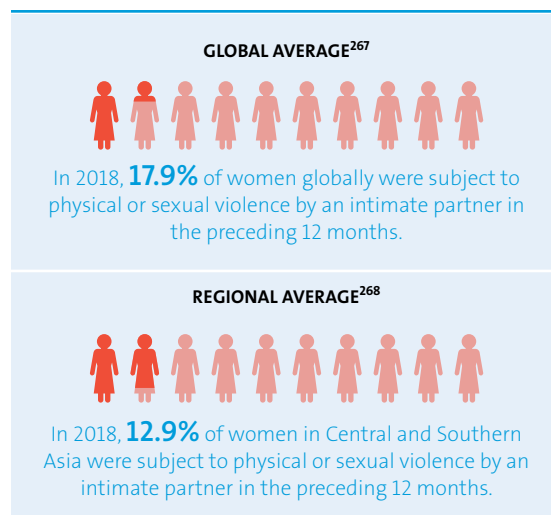
intertwined with gender, religious and cultural norms deeply rooted in and upheld by patriarchy.

The relationship between intimate partner violence and employment is complex. On the one hand, women's income generation tends to increase their bargaining power and influence within the household,²⁶⁴ providing a buffer against intimate partner violence. At the same time, women's control over financial resources threatens gender norms and men's perceived masculinity, and may increase levels of violence.

Spousal violence and marital control perpetrated by men against women is almost twice as likely to occur among women who are employed but not paid in cash (73 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively) than among women who are not employed (55 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively) or who are employed and paid in cash (56 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively). This implies that women earning money by means not immediately accessible to their spouse have a greater risk of violence.²⁶⁵ It underscores the precarious position of many working women in Afghanistan within the household. While their contributions to household income are valued, they face significant, punitive barriers to economic empowerment.

Normalization of gender-based violence

Interpersonal, familial, communal and societal forms of violence are interlinked and shaped by highly unequal gendered societal norms in Afghanistan. These intersect with the impacts of decades of conflict, displacement, natural disasters, climate change and the inability of families to meet basic needs.²⁶⁶ Beyond systemic gender inequality and the normalization of physical violence as a means to resolve conflict, the structural violence of poverty – characterized by unemployment; a lack of income, shelter and/or food; insecurity; and insufficient access to education and healthcare – triggers everyday interpersonal violence.



The acceptance of gender-based violence, including violence against women, is notable. A 2023 study for the United Nations–European Union Spotlight Initiative found a relatively high tolerance of violence among both men and women in Afghanistan.²⁶⁹ Approximately 30 per cent of the population indicated acceptance of the use of violence against women, especially for perceived transgressions such as “going out without permission” or “neglecting children”.²⁷⁰ Tolerance was higher in rural areas, especially in the north, north-east and central regions.

The indicator measuring intimate partner violence does not account for wider societal issues related to gender-based violence. Other forms of violence target women and girls within and outside their households. Women who do not necessarily experience intimate partner violence are often nonetheless survivors of other types of household violence, driven by wider systemic violence and gender inequality. Violence perpetrated by mothers-in-law, for example, is prevalent and overlaps with intimate partner violence.²⁷¹ Gender-based violence represents a continuum of violence between the public and private spheres, and can often be an early warning indicator of state violence and conflict.²⁷²

264. The links between employment, influence in the household and domestic violence were repeatedly noted by Afghan women in quarterly consultations conducted by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA: Reports on consultations include: [April 2024](#), [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#) and [August 2022](#).

265. Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#).

266. Přívara, A. and Přívarová, M., 2019. [Nexus Between Climate Change, Displacement and Conflict: Afghanistan Case](#). Sustainability, 11(20), p.5586.

267. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

268. Ibid.

269. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

270. Spotlight Initiative. 2023.

271. Figures are difficult to come by, though some studies show violence by mothers-in-law to be roughly half as common as by intimate partners. A 2019 study found that 14 per cent of women had experienced physical violence by a mother-in-law and 23.2 per cent physical spousal violence in the previous 12 months; 7 per cent were exposed to both. Jewkes, R., J. Corboz and A. Gibbs. 2019. [“Violence against Afghan Women by Husbands, Mothers-in-Law and Siblings-in-Law/Siblings: Risk Markers and Health Consequences in an Analysis of the Baseline of a Randomised Controlled Trial.”](#) PLoS ONE 14(2): e0211361. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

272. UN Women. 2015. [“Preventing Conflict.”](#) In A Global Study on the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325, Chapter 8. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

Expected trends under the de facto authorities

The historical and cultural conditions driving the high prevalence of gender-based and intimate partner violence in Afghanistan have worsened since the Taliban takeover in 2021, and the ensuing collapse of the economy and shift to formalized gender-segregated spaces and policies. In 2023, following the bans on women working in national and international NGOs and at the United Nations, as well as mobility restrictions that reduced the access of women and girls to humanitarian assistance and other services, the number of women and girls at heightened risk of gender-based violence increased by 30 per cent.²⁷³ It rose further from 13.1 million at the end of 2023 to 14.2 million at the end of 2024.²⁷⁴ The ongoing humanitarian and economic crises have also increased negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage, that will contribute to increasing rates of gender-based violence.

Widespread food insecurity, unemployment and underemployment have led to deteriorating mental health for many Afghans,²⁷⁵ while women face additional mental health strains from mobility restrictions keeping them confined to their homes. Such developments have increased risks of intimate partner violence as women have limited pathways to leave the home safely to seek support.

DFA policies and practices, particularly the ban on education for girls and women, foreshadow a grave trend where intimate partner violence continues to rise. In the Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2015, women who indicated having no education were twice as likely (56 per cent) as women with secondary education (28 per cent) to report instances of violence.²⁷⁶ Childbearing, which increases when educational opportunities decline and early marriage rises, is also clearly linked to intimate partner violence, including during pregnancy. According to the DHS, 33 per cent of Afghan women with no children reported experiencing intimate partner violence, compared to 60 per cent of

women with five or more children. Seven per cent of women with no children reported experiencing intimate partner violence during pregnancy compared to 19 per cent of women with five or more children. These alarming numbers will likely increase as long as the ban on education continues.

Services and support to help survivors of intimate partner violence have significantly reduced their operational scope since August 2021, due to DFA policies and practices. The dismantling of infrastructure to end violence against women, including the Ministry of Women Affairs,²⁷⁷ and the Law on Ending Violence against Women and its specific offices, roles and mandates, which provided a legal framework under which to prosecute cases of violence against women;²⁷⁸ the imposition of a *sharia*-based legal and justice system; the creation of numerous barriers to female lawyers supporting women in the formal justice system; the closure of shelters for survivors of violence and the reduction in the number of safe spaces have all left Afghan women at greater risk of violence with far fewer formal options to seek protection and support.²⁷⁹ The ban on awareness-raising activities also makes it challenging to raise awareness about gender-based violence, which risks contributing to the normalization of the phenomena.

Even where formal support is available, 61 per cent of women who experienced intimate partner violence stated that they had never sought help or told others about the violence.²⁸⁰ Particularly under the current circumstances, women who do seek support more often turn to informal and kinship networks for assistance.²⁸¹ While these tend to be more accessible than formal channels, informal dispute resolution mechanisms are primarily led by men (such as through *shuras* and among family members) and have been roundly criticized as prioritizing family and community cohesion over women's individual rights.²⁸² Without formal support structures, Afghan women experiencing intimate partner violence are left in an acutely vulnerable position, with limited options for escaping abuse.

273. It rose from 10.1 million in May 2023 to 13.1 million by the end of 2023. OCHA. 2023. [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

274. Ibid; OCHA 2024. [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

275. In July 2024, 81 per cent of women consulted in countrywide consultations held by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA reported that their mental health was "bad" or "very bad". UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

276. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

277. Gehrig, M. 2022. [Legal and Justice System Changes and Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Afghanistan](#). Kabul: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

278. The Law on Ending Violence against Women had criminalized 22 acts of GBV against women and girls – including forced and underage marriage, rape, family and intimate partner violence, and the trading of women and girls – and established 242 specialized prosecutors across various government departments, 300 female judges, 800 defence lawyers and Family Response Units in all 34 provinces. UNAMA and OHCHR. 2020. [In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls](#). December. Kabul: UNAMA. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

279. UN Women. 2024. [Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#). Kabul: UN Women Afghanistan. Accessed 4 March 2025

280. Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. [Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015](#). Accessed on 4 March 2025.

281. Salma Consulting. (forthcoming 2025). Community Entry Points for Preventative and Responsive GBV Efforts.

282. Significant barriers exist to women's access to formal and informal dispute resolution bodies. In July 2024, 25 per cent of women surveyed noted a desire to use such bodies but were unable to do so due to a lack of access. Women reported not being allowed to enter courts or public offices dealing with legal affairs without a *mahram*, and having cases dismissed or ignored due to perceived gender discrimination. UN Women, IOM and UNAMA. 2024. [Summary of countrywide consultations with Afghan women](#). July. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

CONCLUSION

The gender data presented in this report paint a grim picture of the unequal status of women and girls in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Gender Index clearly shows that the Taliban have set a new precedent for the extreme manifestation of gender inequality, creating one of the deepest empowerment deficits and widest gender gaps in the world, as captured in the Women's Empowerment Index and Global Gender Parity Index. The vast and coherent regime of decrees and practices to eliminate women's agency, rights and dignity combined with entrenched norms hinders women's ability to achieve their full potential. Progress against SDGs, reflecting Afghanistan's prospects for development and economic growth, will not be possible until the rights of Afghan women and girls are restored.

In 2024, Afghanistan is only moving further away from internationally accepted standards for gender equality. Afghanistan's steady collapse on gender equality is unparalleled, reflecting the devastating impact of DFA policies and practices on globally agreed standards like the SDGs. This can be seen most dramatically in women's complete absence from governance and the expected trend towards zero in women's secondary school completion rate. All other indicators, from labour and financial inclusion to health and freedom from violence, will see the knock-on effects. With data collected for this report before the introduction of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice law and the announcement of the ban on women attending tertiary medical institutes, a further deterioration across all five dimension of the Afghanistan Gender Index is anticipated following these developments.

Afghanistan scores 0.173 on the WEI, indicating that Afghan women are able to access and exercise only 17.3 per cent of their full potential in terms of rights and opportunities. This places Afghanistan at a significantly low level of women's empowerment. Future revisions of the WEI may consider introducing an "extremely low" category to account for such deep disempowerment.

Across the dimensions measured by the GPPI, Afghan women only achieve 23.7 per cent of what Afghan men achieve across key human development dimensions, meaning that the gender gap in Afghanistan is 76.3 per cent. GPPI values of less than 0.6 equate to low performance. Similar to the WEI, Afghanistan's extremely low score on the GGPI may merit a new categorization.

The Afghanistan Gender Index adds to existing gender data and analysis and aims to provide a consolidated benchmark to track shifts in key, globally agreed human development indicators. The data generated offer a baseline to identify progress and setbacks on gender equality, providing a resource to guide policymakers and fuel advocacy. Over time, reliable data will be indispensable for understanding trends, crafting responsive interventions and holding governing – whether recognized or de facto – bodies accountable for their actions towards women and girls. Sustained monitoring would help to keep gender equality issues at the forefront of the global agenda and prevent further erosion of the rights and freedoms of Afghan women.

This current status of women and girls is marked by their exclusion from education, economic participation and decision-making, casting the potential for recovery and progress in Afghanistan after decades of conflict into serious doubt. Across almost all dimensions, historical data from 2000 to 2021 highlight the relatively higher status of women and girls in Afghanistan. Indicators such as women's participation in education, economic activities, and governance showed upward trends across that period, reflecting the meaningful strides Afghan women made toward equality. These gains demonstrate that progress, even under difficult circumstances, is achievable when policies align to support gender equality and patriarchal social norms are effectively challenged. The Afghanistan Gender Index serves as an rigorous reminder, offering a benchmark that reflects both past achievements and the possibility for future recovery.

Ultimately, gender inequality undermines sustainable development; limits capacities to rebuild institutions, diversify the economy and create a resilient and prosperous society; and could signal an increased risk of conflict and instability. The total disenfranchisement of women and girls presents challenges now that will ripple into future generations. Afghanistan's future depends on acknowledging and addressing disparities that more than ever are denying the rights and coursing through the lives of women and girls.



ANNEX 1.

CALCULATION OF THE GLOBAL GENDER PARITY INDEX AND THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INDEX

Global Gender Parity Index

The table below summarizes values of indicators, dimensional indices and the GGPI using data from international sources (2021-2023) and the UN Women survey in 2024.

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SOURCE	INDICATOR VALUE		DIMENSIONAL INDEX VALUE
			FEMALE	MALE	
Life and good health	HALE	WHO	51.3	49.6	0.973
	LE	WHO	61.0	57.4	
Education, skills-building and knowledge	CSE(%)	UN Women survey	11.8	28.9	0.339
	NEET (%)	UN Women survey	77.6	20.2	
Labour and financial inclusion	LFPRCW (%)	UN Women survey	24.2	88.9	0.303
	FINACNT (%)	UN Women survey	6.8	20.1	
Participation in decision-making	PR (%)	UN Women survey	-	-	0.0313*
	LG (%)	UN Women survey	0	100	
	TMNG (%)	UNSDG	5.9	94.1	
GGPI					0.237

*See below on how the dimensional index for participation in decision-making was calculated.

The GGPI is computed in two steps.

1. Four dimension-indices, corresponding to the dimensions of life and good health, education, skills-building and knowledge, labour and financial inclusion and participation in decision-making are constructed and calculated; then
2. The index is computed as the geometric mean of the four dimensional indices.

Four dimension-indices

LIFE AND GOOD HEALTH

$$I_{Health} = \frac{\frac{HALE_f}{LE_f}}{\frac{HALE_m}{LE_m}}$$

EDUCATION, SKILLS-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE

$$I_{Education} = \left(\frac{CSE_f}{CSE_m} \cdot \frac{100 - NEET_f}{100 - NEET_m} \right)^{1/2}$$

LABOUR AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION

$$I_{LFI} = \left(\frac{LFPRCW_f}{LFPRCW_m} \cdot \frac{FINACNT_f}{FINACNT_m} \right)^{1/2}$$

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

$$I_{Decision} = \left(\frac{PR_f}{PR_m} \cdot \frac{LG_f}{LG_m} \cdot \frac{TMNG_f}{TMNG_m} \right)^{1/3}$$

For the dimension on participation in decision-making in Afghanistan, there is only one indicator available – the share of managerial positions held (percentage), by sex (TMNG). The other two indicators cannot be computed, because the national Parliament was suspended in 2021 ($\frac{PR_f}{PR_m} = \frac{0}{0}$) and there is no information about the share of seats held in deliberative local government bodies by either women or men for the years after 2020. We are proposing a shorter form of the index:

$$I_{Decision}^* = \frac{TMNG_f}{TMNG_m}$$

Geometric mean

$$GGPI = \left(I_{Health} \cdot I_{Education} \cdot I_{LFI} \cdot I_{Decision}^* \right)^{1/4}$$

Interpretation of the GGPI and comparisons

The value of 1 on the index indicates parity between women and men in the four selected dimensions. For values below 1, on average, women perform worse than men. When values are above 1, women are doing better.

A value of 0.237 for Afghanistan can be interpreted as women, on average, realizing only 23.7 per cent of the achievements of men on the four dimensions.

The original GGPI published by UNDP and UN Women²⁸³ refers to 2022 and is based on indicators with slightly different specifications. Only Yemen had a lower value at 0.141. Other countries at the bottom of the scores were Iran at 0.393, Lebanon at 0.422 and Pakistan at 0.428.

Note on the GGPI participation in decision-making dimension

For the dimension on participation in decision-making in Afghanistan, only two indicators are available: the share of managerial positions held (TMNG) and the share of seats held in local government (LG). The remaining indicator – share of seats held in the national parliament (PR) cannot be calculated due to the suspension of Afghanistan's National Assembly in 2021.

The original GGPI formula calculates this dimension using the geometric mean of the female-to-male ratios of all three indicators. However, in Afghanistan's case, since the share of seats held by women in local government (LG_f) is zero, using the geometric mean would result in a score of zero for the entire dimension, which would invalidate the GGPI calculation.

To resolve this issue, this report introduces an arithmetic mean within the participation dimension. The PR ratio is excluded due to missing data. The two remaining indicators – LG and TMNG – are used to calculate female-to-male ratios. The ratio for LG is 0 (as there are no women hold seats in local government), and the ratio for TMNG is $5.9 / 94.1 \approx 0.0627$. Taking the arithmetic mean of these two values, $(0 + 0.0627) / 2$, results in a participation dimension score of 0.0313. This value is then combined with the other three dimension scores using the geometric mean to calculate the final GGPI score.

283. UN Women and UNDP, 2023. [The paths to equal. Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). New York: UN Women. Accessed on 4 March 2025.

Women's Empowerment Index

The table below summarizes the values of indicators, dimensional indices and the Women's Empowerment Index using data from international sources (2021–2023) and the 2024 UN Women survey.

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SOURCE	INDICATOR VALUE	NORMALIZED INDICATOR	DIMENSIONAL INDEX VALUE
Life and good health	MMC	UNDESA	48.7	0.487	0.589
	ABR	UNFPA	62.0	0.690	
Education, skills-building and knowledge	CSE _f (%)	UN Women survey	11.8	0.118	0.103
	NEET _f (%)	UN Women survey	77.6	0.087	
Labour and financial inclusion	LFPRCW _f (%)	UN Women survey	24.2	0.242	0.155
	FINACNT _f (%)	UN Women survey	6.8	0.068	
Participation in decision-making	PR _f (%)	UN Women survey	-	-	0.039
	LG _f (%)	UN Women survey	0	-	
	TMNG _f (%)	UNSDG	5.9	0.079	
Freedom from violence	IPV (%)	UNDESA	34.7	0.422	0.422
WEI					0.173

Interpretation of WEI and some comparisons

The higher values on the index indicate a greater empowerment of women in these five dimensions as measured by ten indicators.

A value of 0.173 for Afghanistan indicates that women are empowered in the five dimensions by only 17.3 per cent, on average.

The original Women's Empowerment Index published by UNDP and UN Women refers to 2022 and is based on indicators with slightly different specifications.²⁸⁴ It shows that only women in Yemen with a score of 0.141 were less empowered than women in Afghanistan. Other countries at the bottom of the scores were Niger at 0.307, Pakistan at 0.337, Iraq at 0.363 and Lebanon at 0.372.

284. Ibid.

The WEI is constructed in three steps:

1. The normalization step rescales indicators by a min-max process so that they take values between 0 and 1; then
2. Dimensional indices are created by aggregating normalized indicators using the arithmetic mean; then
3. The dimensional indices are aggregated into the Women's Empowerment Index using the geometric mean.

Most components of the WEI are positive indicators— that is, higher values mean better achievement. However, three components— adolescent birth rate (ABR), female youth not in education, employment or training (NEET_f) and intimate partner violence prevalence among ever-partnered women and girls (IPV)— are negative indicators— that is, higher values mean worse achievement.

The positive and negative indicators are normalized as follows:

$$I_X = \frac{X - X^{\min}}{X^{\max} - X^{\min}}, \text{ or } I_X = \frac{X^{\max} - X}{X^{\max} - X^{\min}}$$

Below, the normalization by formulae are given by dimension and indicator:

LIFE AND GOOD HEALTH

$$I_{MMC} = \frac{MMC}{100}$$

$$I_{ABR} = \frac{ABR^{\max} - ABR}{ABR^{\max}}$$

The original WEI used $ABR^{\max} = 200$.

EDUCATION, SKILLS-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE

$$I_{CSE_f} = \frac{CSE_f}{100}$$

$$I_{NEET_f} = \frac{NEET_f^{\max} - NEET_f}{NEET_f^{\max}}$$

LABOUR AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION

$$I_{LFPRCW_f} = \frac{LFPRCW_f}{100}$$

$$I_{FINACNT_f} = \frac{FINACNT_f}{100}$$

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

$$I_{PR_f} = \frac{PR_f}{PR_f^{\max}}$$

$$I_{LG_f} = \frac{LG_f}{LG_f^{\max}}$$

$$I_{TMNG_f} = \frac{TMNG_f}{TMNG_f^{\max}}$$

The original WEI used:

$PR_f^{\max} = 75$, $LG_f^{\max} = 75$, and $TMNG_f^{\max} = 75$.

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

$$I_{Violence} = \frac{IPV^{\max} - IPV}{IPV^{\max}}$$

The original WEI used $IPV^{\max} = 60$.

The maxima and minima (goal posts) used to normalize the indicators are shown in the table below. These goal posts were used for the original Women's Empowerment Index published in 2023.

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Life and good health	MMC	0	100
	ABR	0	200
Education, skills-building and knowledge	CSE _f	0	100
	NEET _f	0	85
Labour and financial inclusion	LFPRCW _f	0	100
	FINACNT _f	0	100
Participation in decision-making	PR _f	0	75
	LG _f	0	75
	TMNG _f	0	75
Freedom from violence	IPV	0	60

Dimensional indices

The second step, after normalization, is to create the dimensional indices by aggregating normalized indicators using the arithmetic mean.

For the life and good health dimension:

$$I_{Health} = \frac{1}{2} (I_{MMC} + I_{ABR})$$

For the education, skills-building and knowledge dimension:

$$I_{Education} = \frac{1}{2} (I_{CSE_f} + I_{NEET_f})$$

For the labour and financial inclusion dimension:

$$I_{Inclusion} = \frac{1}{2} (I_{LFPRCW_f} + I_{FINACNT_f})$$

For the participation in decision-making dimension:

$$I_{Decision} = \frac{1}{3} (I_{PR_f} + I_{LG_f} + I_{TMNG_f})$$

For the freedom from violence dimension:

$$I_{Violence} = I_{IPV}$$

Aggregation using geometric mean

The third step is the aggregation of the dimensional indices into the WEI using the geometric mean.

$$WEI = (I_{Health} \cdot I_{Education} \cdot I_{Inclusion} \cdot I_{Decision} \cdot I_{Violence})^{\frac{1}{5}}$$

Note on the WEI participation in decision making dimension

For the dimension on participation in decision-making in Afghanistan, only two indicators are available: the share of managerial positions held by women (TMNG_f), and the share of seats in local government held by women (LG_f). The remaining indicator – share of seats in parliament held by women (PR_f) cannot be calculated due to the suspension of Afghanistan's National Assembly in 2021. The absence of a functioning parliament means that there are no men and no women parliamentarians, meaning the indicator cannot be updated and thus left marked as not applicable. While Afghanistan has an all-male cabinet (not elected), data from the cabinet was not used because it would be a significant departure from the global methodology and limit the comparability of data from Afghanistan to the global report.

In the original calculation of the WEI in the global twin indices, the arithmetic mean of all three indicators in the decision-making dimension were calculated first, followed by the geometric mean across all four WEI dimensions to obtain the final index score. However, in this report on Afghanistan, the dimensional index for participation in decision-making is calculated using the average of the two available indicators LG_f and TMNG_f.



ANNEX 2.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL INDICATOR ESTIMATES

The UN Women 2024 survey estimated the educational indicator for the group aged 18-plus. This was due to the use of different age brackets in data collection. This indicator is an SDG indicator, which measures the population aged 25-plus (indicator 4.4.3, educational attainment rate, completed upper secondary education or higher, population 25-plus [percentage]).

In the UN Women Afghanistan Gender Index, this indicator is estimated for the female population aged 18 and older as 11.8 per cent, and for the male population aged 18 and older as 31.6 per cent. This result showed a significant variance from the results obtained by UNESCO²⁸⁵ (see Table 1). It prompted a comparative analysis to determine whether the different age brackets, between 18–24 years of age, could plausibly justify the differences in results obtained.

	FEMALE	MALE
2014	3.02	16.38
2015	3.35	15.99
2016	N/A	N/A
2017	4.24	19.17
2018	N/A	N/A
2019	N/A	N/A
2020	5.58	20.28
2021	5.20	12.10
2022	5.71	19.85

Table 4 Upper secondary school completion rate aged 25+, by gender (percentage)

Analysis of variation

The variation in age brackets used for this indicator has resulted in a significant difference between figures obtained by UNESCO under the SDG indicator age bracket of 25-plus and that obtained through the UN Women survey age bracket of 18-plus. UN Women conducted comparative analysis of education indicators to determine the plausibility of the figures. Calculations included estimations of the population in the age bracket 18–24 and the estimated share of the population with completed secondary education or higher (CSEH) in that age group.

Based on the analysis, the share of the female population with CSEH estimated from the survey data as 11.8 per cent was acceptable despite a large difference with the SDG indicator. It is important to bear in mind that the reference populations for these two indicators are different and that the survey estimate is based on the SDG reference population extended by cohorts of young adults (18–24) who are better educated and who were allowed to enrol in secondary schools up to 2021.

The same analysis has shown that the survey-based estimate of the share of male population with CSEH as 31.6 is overestimated and is not acceptable, because the derived estimate of share of the male population with CSEH for the age group (18–24) is not plausible. This can be explained by observing that secondary and higher education for boys has never been restricted. There was no change in educational policy regarding boys, so it would be difficult to justify the increase of the estimate of the male population with CSEH by about 60 per cent.

285. Change to: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. [SDG data](#). Accessed on 18 March 2025.

Adjustment of male population indicator

	POPULATION		SHARE OF POPULATION WITH CSEH		POPULATION WITH CSEH	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
18+	7,791,168	7,772,486	11.8	31.6	919,357.8	2,456,106
25+	5,610,602	5,726,588	5.7	19.9	319,804	1,139,591
18–24	2,180,566	5,726,588	27.5	19.9	599,553.8	1,316,515

Table 5 Population size with CSEH before adjustment, by age and gender population 18-plus

This indicator was adjusted as follows:

1. Based on the assumption that the share of male population with CSEH in the age group (18–24) is equal to the minimum of net enrolment rates to secondary education²⁸⁶ in the relevant period 2014–2018, i.e., 54.17 per cent.²⁸⁷
2. Applied to the population size, this assumed rate of CSEH implies that $1,108,263 = (2,045,898 \times 0.5417)$ males from age-group (18–24) have CSEH.
3. Further, it means that: $2,247,854 = (1,108,263 + 1,139,591)$ males from the 18-plus age group have CSEH, which brings the share of male population with CSEH in the age group 18-plus equal to 28.92 per cent ($= 2,247,854 / 7,772,486$).

Therefore, instead of using a survey-based estimate of the share of male population with CSEH as 31.6 per cent, we use an adjusted survey-based estimate of 28.9 per cent.

This estimate is higher than the estimate from the SDG database by 9.02 percentage points. The difference can be attributed to the expanded reference population to the 18-plus age group.

286. Net enrolment rate for Afghanistan is available for the years up to 2018 in the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics \(UIS\) database](#).

287. This estimate (54.17) refers to 2016. Net enrolment rates in the period 2014–2018 are available at [UNESCO Institute for Statistics \(UIS\) database](#). Accessed on May 15 2024.

ANNEX 3.

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional, mixed-method study was conducted with a representative population of Afghanistan. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the conditions of women and girls in Afghanistan. This approach provided both statistically representative data for the two indices and in-depth narratives reflecting participants' perspectives. The study was completed with diverse populations and involved both men and women to capture insights about their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding gender and local understandings of gender equality. While the thematic focus was on women and girls, including men in the survey was essential to understand gender parity and gender dynamics. As such, men comprised 50 per cent of survey participants.

Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods included a household survey conducted in all eight regions of Afghanistan,²⁸⁸ with 2,155 respondents (1,066 women and 1,089 men) in face-to-face interviews by male and female field researchers. Roughly a quarter of responses were from urban settlements, and three quarters were from rural areas, reflecting the real proportions in Afghan society. All seven major ethnicities were covered by the survey, with nearly half the sample being from the predominant Pashtun community, followed by Tajik and Hazara communities. The survey questions were tailored to inform specific indicators within the thematic areas of the twin indices and supplemented by national data for certain indices.

Post-completion, each survey was weighted for analysis to help align the sample to national population benchmarks so that representative inferences can be drawn in the data analysis. This process of post-stratified weighting considered regions, location (urban or rural), sex and age groups as factors to compute the weights, benchmarking to various databases published by the National Statistics and Information Authority of Afghanistan.

Sampling Approach (n=2050)

A multi-stage sample (four stages) was implemented with stratification and clustering. This sampling approach was proposed as an alternative to the traditional probability proportional to size approach. A PPS approach relies on well-defined population sizes at each stage of the sample selection. Without available comprehensive population data, precise PPS selection cannot be undertaken without the risk of introducing significant bias through over- or underrepresenting respondent types.

This approach utilized equal allocation and simple random selection at each stage. This approach was also designed to be the most cost-efficient and time-effective by limiting the number of geographic area selection possibilities.

While the survey design and the sample size provide the representative data for the major demographic groups (by urban/rural, by sex, and by age groups), other groups, such as employment status (employed/unemployed), are not necessarily representative of the real distribution of employment in the population. Nevertheless, there is no other information to compare to and confirm if these categories of employment are obtained with sufficient reliability.

Two-hundred and fifty-six interviews were allocated to each region (across eight regions) for a total of 2,048 interviews. Within each province, four districts were selected, one urban and three rural. Within each district, two villages were selected. Within each village, eight households were selected through a random walk approach utilizing the right-hand rule.

This approach was designed to ensure the disbursement of the sample while remaining within the project timeline and budgetary constraints. That is, it introduced a degree of control over the number of geographic areas that the interview team covered. Such control would not have been possible under a two-stage approach.

288. Provinces includes: Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktya, and Wardak.

The stages of sample selection were as follows:

Stage 1 (cluster stage 1) Allocate interviews equally to each of the regions in Afghanistan and then randomly select two provinces within each region. This ensures that the sample is dispersed across the region, capturing internal heterogeneity while adhering to the project's timelines and budgetary constraints.

Stage 2 (cluster stage 2) Randomly select 3 rural districts and one urban centre within each province.

Stage 3 (cluster stage 3) Randomly select 2 villages within each district or province.

Stage 4 Randomly select eight households/ respondents within each village through a random walk approach utilising the righthand rule.

Sample size

The sampling options were derived using the formula below. A sample size was calculated for one sex and then multiplied by 2 (for both male and female).

$$n = \{[t^2 * ((p * q) / d^2)] * DEFF\} * NRR^{\wedge}$$

Where:

n = sample size

t = z-score at 95% for cluster sampling (1.96)

p = expected prevalence (50% for conservative estimate)

q = expected non-prevalence (50%)

d = confidence interval (+/- 5%)

DEFF = design effect = 2.67

NRR = Inverse of non-response rate = 1

$$n = \{[2.0452 * ((.5 * .5) / .052)] * 1.2\} * 1$$

$$n = \{[3.8416 * ((.25) / .0025)] * 2.67\} * 1$$

$$n = \{[3.8416 * 100] * 2.67\} * 1$$

$$n = \{960.4\} * 1$$

$$n = 960.4$$

$$n = \sim 960 \text{ (each sex) Rural Urban adjustment}$$

$$n = 1025$$

$$n = 2050$$

The total number of surveys completed was **n=2155**, including a small oversampling, which is a standard practice in quantitative data collection.

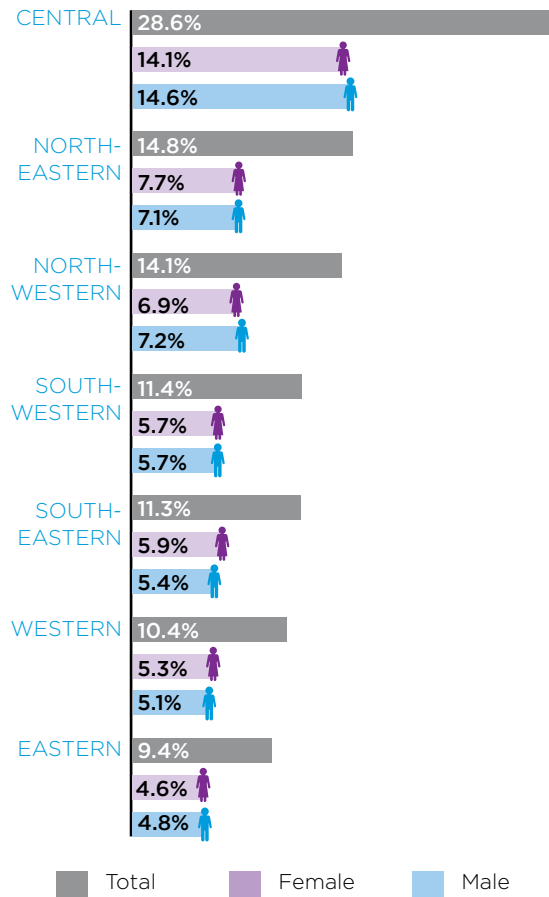


Figure 11 Regional distribution of quantitative sample by gender distribution

Qualitative Methods

While quantitative metrics offer some understanding of the scope or shifts of a particular condition or problem, they can reduce complex social and community processes to decontextualized and individualized numbers from one moment in time. This study included a large qualitative component to explain, contextualize and nuance the results of the Afghanistan Gender Index indicators, so that readers have a deeper understanding of what the indicators mean in terms of progress towards gender equality for women and girls in Afghanistan.

The qualitative component of the study comprised quasi-ethnographic case studies. Five communities were selected across five provinces to broadly represent the diversity of populations. Communities included the following characteristics: two rural communities (in Helmand and Faryab provinces), one urban (Kabul), one remote rural (Bamyan) and one informal settlement with internally displaced people and returnees (Nangarhar).

Within these locations a range of ethnic groups were engaged including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara. Focus group discussions were conducted in each community with a broad range of female respondents at different age-related life stages: adolescent girls, single women and married women over 26 years old. In addition, individual or paired interviews were held with women over the age of 50, widows who were heads of households, widows in joint families and mothers-in-law. This was to ensure that data captured the intersectional differences among female respondents, given that women are not a homogenous group. Indeed, some respondents overlapped in categories as some widows were also mothers-in-law, and some women over 50 were also widows. Importantly, groups of men were also engaged as well as community and religious leaders to understand their perspectives on community challenges, especially as they related to women and girls.

Additionally, a mix of individual, paired and group discussions with special interest groups were held to understand common challenges and particularities. These groups included businesswomen, health workers, teachers and female university graduates. All interviews were completed face-to-face by teams of female and male researchers based in each province in either Dari or Pashto.

To further contextualize the interview data, research teams completed observation sheets for each day they spent in the community, focusing on female and male visibility, interactions and activities in public spaces. Brief community profiles were also produced covering basic demographic and infrastructural information, such as population numbers, average incomes, and the existence (or not) of schools, madrassas and health centres, for example.

		COMMUNITY PROFILE	FGDS	IDIS	OBSERVATIONS
SAMPLE COMMUNITIES	Bamyan	1	4	4	4
	Faryab	1	4	5	6
	Helmand	1	2	3	1
	Kabul	1	4	12	3
	Nangarhar	1	4	4	2
THEMATIC	Kandahar	N/A	N/A	4	N/A
	Herat				
	Balkh				
TOTAL	Total	5	18	32	16

Table 6 Types of qualitative data collected by province in the sample communities

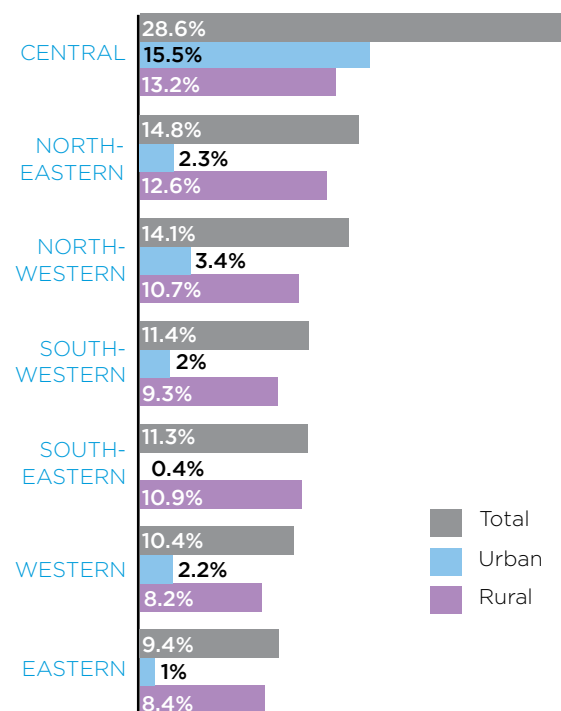


Figure 12 Regional distribution of qualitative sample by rurality

Ethics and Risk Assessment

Given the sensitivity around women's rights in Afghanistan, stringent ethical guidelines were put in place. The primary aim was to "do no harm", which included various practices while in the field to ensure the safety of respondents, the community and researchers. Verbal informed consent was required from every participant prior to starting any interview. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and how data would be used and reported, and then were provided with contact information should they decide to withdraw their interview following completion of the data collection. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time. Additionally, interviews were held in spaces identified as "safe and private" by respondents. Respondents selected the sites to ensure their sense of security. This normally meant interviews were held in the respondent's house, or in the case of focus group discussions, in the home of one of the respondents

Engagement with community leaders took place in the early stages of the study. Their role as community gatekeepers acts as a safeguarding practice, ensuring researchers have permission to conduct research in the community and build the confidence of respondents about the validity of the research. In any instance that respondents shared any protection concerns or wanted to seek professional support regarding experiences of violence, they were provided with a hotline number that would direct them to the nearest service provider for additional support.

Due to the security situation, revisits were not attempted. A replacement was made for each house that was selected and no one was home. Confidentiality was ensured by not collecting personal information (contact name, number, address), rather through GPS but only accessible by Salma Consulting's central team.

Limitations

There are a range of limitations critical for readers to understand when interpreting findings and their usability and representativeness. The door-to-door survey took place in a challenging operating environment, placing limitations on data collection.

Participants under 18 were excluded due to socio-cultural taboos that restrict interaction with female minors by non-family members. Consequently, the survey focused on individuals aged 18 and older. The original twin indices is measured based on data

from individuals aged 15-plus. Minors aged 12–17, however, participated in the qualitative focus group discussions, to ensure their voices and experiences were still included in the study.

An additional limitation of the qualitative sample is that it includes an above average number of formally educated respondents in terms of the number of years of schooling completed in relation to the education levels of the general population. This is possibly because more educated respondents proved easier to access. By engaging with more literate women, higher quality data can be acquired, although unfortunately it has meant that the views of more marginalized, hard-to-reach women were not accessed and included in the study.

Another limitation was in terms of the ethnicity of qualitative interviewees. Hazara and Uzbek respondents are overrepresented and Pashtun respondents are somewhat underrepresented. This was because of the qualitative sites selected.

Translation is an area which can cause limitations. In Faryab province, all illiterate women (who were planned to be interviewed) spoke Uzbek and did not speak Dari or Pashto. Uzbek to English translators are challenging to identify in Afghanistan, and as such, the decision was made to only engage with those who could speak Dari or Pashto, missing other nuances among the Uzbek-only speaking populations in the sampled community.

Lastly, while not necessarily a limitation, but an important caveat for qualitative data is that cannot and should not be quantified. It cannot be said whether views presented among communities in qualitative interviews were only among the minority, majority or represent an isolated view. Instead, they are intended to demonstrate the diversity of experience, highlighting the implications of intersectionality, context and history. The qualitative findings exemplify the importance of not homogenizing populations, and recognizing that each person has their own experiences, history and ambitions, which may or may not align with others.

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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