

GENDER ALERT — AUGUST 2025

FOUR YEARS OF TALIBAN RULE:

AFGHAN WOMEN RESIST AS RESTRICTIONS TIGHTEN

AFGHAN WOMEN CONTINUE TO LEAD EFFORTS TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

Yet, four years since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the scale and severity of the women's rights crisis remains among the most extreme globally – comparable only to Yemen. Afghanistan remains a protracted humanitarian crisis, in which systemic and institutionalised gendered restrictions are exacerbating existing needs.¹ Women and girls continue to shoulder the greatest burdens. As international attention shifts elsewhere, we see the normalization of the women's rights crisis intensify. **This multitude of crises are not only eroding women's rights but also jeopardizing the country's future, undermining development, and stalling economic growth.**

UN Women has compiled an overview of ten key issues which underpin the most severe women's rights crisis in the world, affecting 21 million women living in Afghanistan. This Gender Alert illustrates how these issues are contributing to normalization of restrictions since the Taliban takeover, while outlining four priority actions for the years to come.

METHODOLOGY

Drawing on four years of consultations, research, and analysis conducted by UN Women and its partners since the Taliban takeover, the Gender Alert incorporates findings from the following initiatives:

2025 Gender Flagship Survey

Conducted between February and March 2025 this nation-wide door-to-door survey reached 2,190 Afghans (1,116 men and 1,074 women) across all regions of Afghanistan. Designed to provide current, representative data to inform policymaking and programming, the survey captures perceptions on healthcare, security, social cohesion, social norms and future aspirations. The data is referenced in this Alert as 2025 door-to-door survey data.

Monitoring the Status of Women in Afghanistan Survey

This multi-round random-dialer telesurvey collects quantitative data disaggregated by geography (urban/peri-urban/rural) and identity markers (gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education). It assesses the impact of Taliban-imposed restrictions on women's rights, covering issues such as safety, mental health, and broader policy effects. To date, three rounds have been completed in 2023 to 2025. This is referenced in this Alert as telesurvey data.

Consultation Cycle with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Since August 2022, UN Women together with UNAMA and IOM have undertaken regular consultations to document women's experiences and their recommendations for decision-makers. These consultations aim to safeguard a space for women to speak freely, countering efforts to erase their voices from public discourse. Consultations were conducted from 2022 to 2025.² The data is referenced in this Alert as consultations conducted by UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM.

See Annex 1 for a comprehensive methodological overview.

¹ See *Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. 2025. Gender Alert: Gendered Needs and Challenges of Afghans Returning from Iran and Pakistan (June 2025)*, for a recent update on the humanitarian situation in the country.

² Reports on previous consultations: October 2024 (unpublished), [July 2024](#), [April 2024](#), [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#), and [August 2022](#).

TEN INSIGHTS INTO THE SITUATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN AND GIRLS



An Afghan mother holds her daughter, staring at the light from behind her obscured window. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell.

1. HOPE ENDURES AMIDST A WOMEN'S RIGHTS CRISIS

Despite systemic repression, Afghan women still envision a future where change and equality is possible. Over half of the women who participated in the 2025 door-to-door survey reported feeling hopeful that they would be able to achieve some of their future aspirations – even as nearly every avenue for participation in public life has closed.³ Among rural women, more than 40 per cent still **hope to see an Afghanistan in which women and girls enjoy the same rights as men and boys.**⁴

Yet, hope has become an organizing principle rather than an idle wish – a deliberate response to a reality where Afghan women, on average, are able to exercise just 17 per cent of their full rights and freedoms, according to the 2024 Afghanistan Gender Index.⁵ Research on Afghanistan also shows that hope is a central coping mechanism which fills a unique role in times of protracted conflict and repression, drawing strength from deeply rooted values such as faith and family unity.⁶

The tension between hope and what is currently achievable is ever-present. While self-reported hopefulness to reach personal aspirations remains high, women consulted through the door-to-door survey also stated that they are currently facing obstacles in achieving their goals. More than half (51 per cent of Afghan women) identified Taliban-enforced restrictions as a barrier to achieving their aspirations.⁷

Nevertheless, Afghan women's resistance persists, and is visible in everyday acts: Afghan women serve as frontline humanitarian workers, teachers, medical professionals, and entrepreneurs. They document violations of rights, build solidarity networks, and advocate for peace in their communities. These efforts underscore the fact that **hope, for Afghan women, is both a political response and a lifeline.**

³ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ UN Women. 2025. *Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan*.

⁶ See Eggerman, M. and Panter-Brick, C. (2010). *Suffering, hope, and entrapment: Resilience and cultural values in Afghanistan*. *Soc Sci Med*, 71(1-2), pp. 71-83.

⁷ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

2. DECREE ENFORCEMENT IS CONSOLIDATING NATIONWIDE

The initial phase of the Taliban takeover was marked by the introduction of a flurry of directives touching on almost every aspect of a woman's life. Four years later, not a single edict aimed at controlling the lives of women and girls has been repealed. Restrictions that were once framed as temporary have become the norm.

During this early period, enforcement was inconsistent – some edicts were ignored, and mechanisms to ensure compliance were still taking shape. Four years on, **a more complex and systematic enforcement model has taken hold**, limiting the variance that exists across the country. By early 2025, 80 per cent of rural women consulted through the door-to-door survey reported being unable to reach a health facility without a *mahram* (male chaperone).⁸

The impact of the ban on women non-governmental organization (NGO) workers has also intensified: 97 per cent of women telesurveyed in areas where the ban is reportedly enforced said they had been negatively affected, up from 86 per cent in 2024.⁹ The ban curtails women's right to work, earn an income, and participate in public life – and it deprives communities of essential aid and services that depend on women's presence in frontline response.

Women's access to education, employment, public spaces, and services continues to be curtailed. The *de facto* authorities (DFA) remain the central enforcers of these measures, underscoring the consolidation of power and centralized control over women's rights and freedoms.

This environment has also fostered a pattern of anticipatory compliance. The fear of punishment has led families, NGOs, and businesses – to pre-emptively restrict women's freedoms, even in the absence of formal decrees.¹⁰

3. THE 2024 PVPV LAW CODIFIES A SYSTEM OF GENDER CONTROL

On 21 August 2024, the DFA promulgated the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) – commonly referred to as the “Morality Law”. Backed by more than 3,300 inspectors, the law codifies a sweeping set of restrictions, including the classification of women's voices as *awrah* – to be concealed and not heard in public – and the requirement for male accompaniment almost every time a woman leaves her home.¹¹

This law marks a turning point. It crystallizes what many Afghan women had already experienced: that **restrictions on their rights are not temporary measures but a core pillar of the Taliban's governance**. The law is already reshaping daily life. According to telesurveys conducted in 2024, within three months of its adoption, nationwide reporting on the girls' education ban rose from 79 to 97 per cent.¹² Close to one year after the law became public, enforcement of restrictions on women's access to parks, gyms, and recreational spaces nearly doubled.¹³

Its chilling effect is also measurable: 43 per cent of Afghans – women and men – now report that they “speak less” in public than they did before August 2021.¹⁴ The law is also transforming private and familial spaces by embedding these norms into everyday behaviour. Men in families and communities are enforcing DFA decrees out of fear of reprisal – a fear heightened as the language of many decrees formally holds men responsible for women's compliance.¹⁵ Social pressure compounds this, as the arrest of a woman for defying the DFA is seen to bring shame on her family and community.

In short, this diffusion of responsibility is weaving control of women into the fabric of everyday life, accelerating the internalization of discriminatory norms and increasing the risk that **women's exclusion is viewed as normal – or inevitable**.

⁸ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

⁹ UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 3 Survey. Unpublished.

¹⁰ UN Women. 2022. *Media restrictions and the implication for gender equality in Afghanistan*; UN Women closed circulation on the impact of the PVPV law (2024) ; UN Women. 2024. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 1 Survey. Unpublished.

¹¹ UNAMA. 2025. *Report on the Implementation, Enforcement and Impact of PVPV Law in Afghanistan*.

¹² UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 1 Survey. Unpublished; UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 2 Survey. Unpublished.

¹³ Restrictions on women's access to parks, gyms, and recreational spaces rose from 15 per cent in 2024 to 26 per cent in 2025. UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 1 Survey. Unpublished; UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 3 Survey. Unpublished.

¹⁴ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

¹⁵ Telesurveys conducted as part of the Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls initiative shows that female family members are in some instances enforcing decrees. Between Round 1 (August 2024) and Round 2 (October 2024) of the enforcement by female family members rose from 5% (Round 1) to 13% (Round 2). This trend suggests a permeation of enforcement responsibilities into all layers of Afghan households.

4. DEEP ROOTED NORMS UNDERPIN RESTRICTIVE DECREES

Afghanistan's patriarchal norms long predate August 2021. Measures introduced by the DFA to curtail women's rights have operated within – and further entrenched – this existing framework.

Marriage practices illustrate the extent of these embedded norms. Marriage in Afghanistan is deeply intertwined with cultural traditions, economic pressures, and social expectations, with decisions often taken at the family or community level. Factors such as preserving social honour, resolving disputes, or securing financial stability frequently outweigh individual choice.¹⁶ Before the Taliban takeover, Afghan women and girls already had limited influence over decisions about if, when, and whom to marry. In a 2024 telesurvey, only 21 per cent of women reported that women had “a lot of influence” over such decisions before August 2021, and 19 per cent said this influence had declined since the takeover.¹⁷

Women's lack of decision-making power extends beyond marriage. Consultations conducted by UN Women, UNAMA and IOM in 2025 found that 24 per cent of women reported having no influence over decisions within their household, 50 per cent within their extended family, and 74 per cent in their communities. Men reported notably lower levels of disempowerment across the same domains.¹⁸ This suggests both the persistence of gendered exclusion and, in some areas, a further **narrowing of women's agency under the Taliban**.

The systematic exclusion of women from education and work is also reinforcing perceptions that women are unfit for public life and decision-making roles. Consultations indicate that the erosion of women's visibility and participation has weakened their perceived legitimacy within their families and communities.¹⁹ Consultations conducted in 2024 by UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM found that mothers exert significantly less influence over boys in the household (6 per cent) compared to fathers (24 per cent), underscoring how these gendered norms are being reproduced across generations.²⁰

In other words: the **institutionalization of male supremacy in public life is reshaping dynamics within the home**, reinforcing perceptions that women lack the capacity – or need – for political, economic, or social participation.



Women picking plant seeds in a greenhouse in Herat province, western Afghanistan, in 2023. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell.

¹⁶ UN Women and UNAMA. 2024. Summary of Countrywide Consultation with Afghan Women. October. Unpublished.

¹⁷ UN Women. 2024. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 2 Survey. Unpublished.

¹⁸ For men, zero per cent reported having no influence at home, 11 per cent within their extended families, and 52 per cent in their communities. UN Women, UNAMA, IOM. 2025. Summary of Countrywide Consultation with Afghan Women. April. Unpublished.

¹⁹ UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM. 2024. [Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women](#). July.

²⁰ UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM. 2024. [Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women](#). July; UN Women. 2024. [Resolve of Afghan women in the face of erasure: Three years since the Taliban takeover](#).



Women attend a business training class, which is supported by UN Women. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell.

5. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT BANS ARE SIDELINING A GENERATION

The intersection of Taliban-imposed bans on education and employment is devastating a generation of Afghan women youth. Nearly 80 per cent of young Afghan women (18-29) are not in education, employment or training, as compared to 20 per cent of men.²¹ **The Taliban's 2022 ban on women attending university, extended to medical institutes in 2024, has further curtailed prospects for young women.**

While protracted economic and humanitarian crises are driving more women into the labour force, a significant gender gap persists. Across Afghanistan, women and men struggle to find sustainable, decent work. As of 2024, 24 per cent of Afghan women participate in the labour force – including employed women and women seeking employment – compared to nearly 90 per cent of men.²² For women, labour force participation often fails to translate into formal or meaningful employment, with most work taking place in informal, insecure, and unprotected settings. The continued social and economic exclusion of women is projected to cost Afghanistan's economy an estimated US \$920 million between 2024 and 2026.²³

Limitations on women's access to education is also expected to have devastating long-term impacts on women's health. UN Women's statistical projections indicate that current **restrictions on education will drive a 25 per cent increase in child marriage**, a 45 per cent rise in early childbearing among adolescent girls, and at least a 50 per cent surge in maternal mortality by 2026.²⁴

The cumulative impact of these restrictions goes beyond economics. Women's ability to imagine a future in which they can work, lead, and contribute is being systematically dismantled. Yet Afghan society's views on education remain starkly at odds with Taliban policy. In 2025, 91 per cent of the 2,190 Afghans reached through door-to-door surveys reported that the DFA do not share their values when it comes to educational opportunities for girls – 88 per cent of men and 94 per cent of women held this view.²⁵

Widespread support for education spans gender and geography: 92 per cent of respondents (87 per cent rural men, 95 per cent rural women; 95 per cent urban men, 95 per cent urban women) believe it is important for girls to receive secondary education.²⁶ Among men, 63 per cent describe a father who supports girls' education as "pious," reflecting deep alignment on the right to learn.²⁷

²¹ UN Women. 2025. *Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan*.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ UNDP. 2025. *Afghanistan Socio-Economic Review*.

²⁴ UN Women. 2024. *Gender Country Profile: Afghanistan*.

²⁵ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 89 per cent of respondents (87 per cent male, 91 per cent female; 88 per cent rural, 90 per cent urban) believe it is appropriate for girls to receive primary education. *Ibid.*

6. EVERY DAY SAFETY AND MOBILITY HAVE ERODED FOR AFGHAN WOMEN

Afghan women are experiencing a shift from visible battlefield violence to more invisible forms of control – enforced through restrictions, surveillance, and the fear of punishment. Despite the formal end of armed conflict, most women do not feel safe in their own communities. In 2025, more than one in three women telesurveyed indicated feeling unsafe leaving their homes by themselves.²⁸

Some women reported avoiding public spaces due to concerns about encountering DFA or broader societal expectations, while others described interactions with the DFA that negatively affected their sense of security and dignity.²⁹ This climate of fear is not limited to women: 19 per cent of men consulted by UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM in 2024 said they felt “not at all” safe leaving the home alone, suggesting a broader erosion of social trust.³⁰

Restrictions on women’s freedom of movement – driven by *mahram* requirements – are producing stark gender disparities. In 2025, 14 per cent of women consulted by UN Women, UNAMA, and IOM reported leaving their homes only once a week, a pattern not reported among men.³¹ In this same consultation, 88 per cent of men reported leaving their homes at least once daily, while only 41 per cent of women did the same.³²

Severe limitations on women’s mobility holds significant implications for their access to education, healthcare, livelihoods, and public life.

This is dovetailed by a worsening nationwide health crisis. In 2025, close to 75 per cent of women across all regions telesurveyed described their mental health as bad or very bad³³ and, in 2024, one-third reported difficulty accessing health services.³⁴

While no data exists to quantify the full scale of gender-based violence, risk factors have intensified under the DFA. The fragile infrastructure built to address violence against women – including the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Law on Ending Violence against Women – has been dismantled. Since August 2021, services for survivors of intimate partner violence have sharply reduced their operational scope.³⁵

In the absence of formal support, women more often turn to informal or kinship networks.³⁶ While more accessible, these mechanisms are typically male-led and often prioritize family and community cohesion over women’s individual rights. As a result, women facing intimate partner violence are left in an acutely vulnerable position, with limited avenues to escape abuse.

In short, DFA decrees and practices – particularly the ban on girls’ and women’s education – foreshadow a grave trend: **intimate partner violence, albeit a long-standing issue, is likely to rise, with fewer protections and support systems available to survivors.**³⁷ According to the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), women with no formal education were twice as likely to report experiencing violence (56 per cent) compared to women with a secondary education (28 per cent).³⁸ And now, global aid cuts, discussed below, are closing the last spaces where Afghan women can organize to end violence against women.

²⁸ UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 3 Survey. Unpublished.

²⁹ UN Women. 2025. 2025 Gender Flagship Survey. Unpublished.

³⁰ UN Women, UNAMA, IOM. 2024. Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women. July.

³¹ UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 3 Survey. Unpublished.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ UN Women. 2025. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 3 Survey. Unpublished.

³⁴ UN Women. 2025. Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Spotlight Initiative. 2023. Study on Prevention and Protection Mechanisms Relating to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices.

³⁷ Central Statistics Organization (CSO), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and ICF. 2017. Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

7. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN DECISION-MAKING HAS VANISHED

Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, women have been systematically excluded from all levels of political and public life. The Taliban's *de facto* cabinet, announced on 7 September 2021, remains entirely male. Leadership positions at the sub-national level are similarly dominated by men, with no women holding formal positions of authority in *de facto* structures. No institutional mechanisms exist to enable women to voice priorities or participate in governance structures.

In response to their formal exclusion from governance structures, **some women have sought alternative channels of influence**, engaging informally with local and national DFAs. Over the past four years, a number of Afghan women have secured meetings with *de facto* officials to raise concerns affecting their communities and organizations. These interactions demonstrate resilience and leadership – and political savviness – but they remain at the discretion of individual officials and are not indicative of institutional acceptance of women's participation in public life.

Such engagement tends to be limited to issues where the Taliban have shown some willingness to interact with women – such as crisis, climate change, prison conditions, and aspects of the private sector. Attempts to advance dialogue on rights, governance and political participation remain exceptionally difficult.

8. INHERITANCE RIGHTS OFFER A NARROW FOOTHOLD

The Taliban's December 2021 decree on women's rights presents their position on women's rights and women's protection, shaped by their unconventional interpretation of *Sharia* law. The decree banned forced marriage of adult women and widows, prohibited the practice of *baad*,³⁹ enshrined women's right to inheritance and ordered men with multiple wives to “maintain justice between them”.⁴⁰ Many women and men consulted by UN Women and UNAMA remain unaware of the decree and the rights to inheritance it enshrines.⁴¹

Most women and men telesurveyed in 2024 reported no change in access to inheritance since August 2021 (82 per cent of women, 80 per cent of men).⁴² A minority saw a slight increase (10 per cent of all respondents), while 8 per cent perceived a decline.⁴³ These findings point to continuity – but not progress. Structural barriers persist, such as pressure from male relatives, lack of legal recourse, and fear of backlash. **Stigma continues to prevent many women from claiming their inheritance.**⁴⁴

Nevertheless, inheritance remains a critical – and often overlooked – lifeline. Women participating in the consultations have highlighted that inheritance is a critical source of support, particularly during periods of economic hardship, displacement, or widowhood.⁴⁵ Access to inheritance provides essential resources for women and their families but also reduces dependency on male relatives, enabling greater autonomy in decision-making and participation in public and economic life.

Consultations undertaken by UN Women revealed that in some provinces – such as Kunar, Laghman, Herat, Badghis, Zabul and Kandahar – individual officials have supported women's inheritance claims in court.⁴⁶ These cases are exceptions, not the norm, but they highlight inheritance as a potential entry point for engagement with the DFA.

³⁹ *Baad* is the practice of forced marriage of young women or girls in a family to settle a dispute over serious crimes. See UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) and OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights). 2010. *Harmful Traditional Practices and Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan*. Kabul.

⁴⁰ *Special Decree issued by the Taliban Leader on Women's Rights*, Decree Number 395, dated 3 December 2021, Article 6.

⁴¹ UN Women and UNAMA. 2024. Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women. October. Unpublished.

⁴² UN Women. 2024. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 2 Survey. Unpublished.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ UN Women. 2024. Monitoring of Status of Women and Girls: Round 2 Survey. Unpublished. UN Women and UNAMA. 2024. Summary of Countrywide Consultation with Afghan Women. October. Unpublished.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ UN Women and UNAMA. 2024. Summary of Countrywide Consultation with Afghan Women. October. Unpublished.



Women doing domestic chores in Bamyan province, in 2024. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell.

9. AID CUTS RISK CLOSING THE ENTRY POINTS AFGHAN WOMEN HAVE BROKERED

Funding reductions are jeopardizing what remains of Afghan women's civic space. **Global reductions in aid budgets⁴⁷ threaten the hard-won progress Afghan women have achieved**, especially the fragile entry points Afghan women have negotiated post-August 2021.

Since 2021, women-led organizations (WLOs) in Afghanistan have been on the frontlines – delivering essential services, documenting abuses, and sustaining networks of solidarity. Today, many are being forced to close. Close to 40 per cent of 207 organizations surveyed in Afghanistan in March 2025 reported that all donor-dependent projects were on hold, while others have scaled back operations dramatically.⁴⁸ The same organizations also reported that 25 per cent of women staff had to be let go due to the funding freeze.⁴⁹

The consequences are immediate and far-reaching. One in three WLOs from this survey said they could no longer effectively reach women and girls in their communities.⁵⁰ This not only restricts service delivery but also weakens Afghan women's ability to maintain presence, visibility, and leadership in public life. Globally, evidence shows that **independent women's movements are among the most effective drivers of gender equality gains.**⁵¹ In Afghanistan, defunding them risks further entrenching and normalizing the deeply exclusionary system the Taliban has put in place.

Despite these setbacks, Afghan women continue to drive grassroots efforts, leading community development, advocating for policy change, and providing critical support to those in need. **These efforts need sustained, flexible, and risk-tolerant investment** – not short-term project funding. Without it, the few remaining footholds Afghan women have brokered risk slipping away.

⁴⁷ According to a global survey conducted by UN Women in March 2025, 90 per cent of organizations reported being financially impacted by aid cuts, with 47 per cent expecting to shut down within the coming six months if the current conditions remain. See UN Women. 2025. *At a breaking point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women's organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide*.

⁴⁸ Tracking Impact Report on The Ban and Other Restrictions on Women for NGOs, INGOs and UN - *Eleventh snapshot* (March 2025)

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See O'Neil, T. and Domingo, P. (2015). *The power to decide: Women, decision-making and gender equality*. ODI briefing September 2015; O'Neil, T., Domingo, P. and Plank, G. (2015). *Support to women and girls' leadership: a rapid review of the evidence*. ODI. Research report April 2015; Weldon, S. L., Htun, M. (2013). *Feminist mobilization and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women*. Gender & Development, 21(2), pp. 231-247.

10. A STRING OF REFUGEE CRISES IS DEEPENING THE RIGHTS CRISIS

From January 2025 to now, more than 1.7 million Afghans – primarily from Pakistan and Iran – have returned to Afghanistan, many forcibly. Historically, the returnees from Pakistan have comprised mostly women, girls, and boys, with women-headed households accounting for around 18 per cent.⁵² The composition of returnees from Iran is also shifting, with increasing numbers of families and women among those returning. Between 1 and 24 June 2025 alone, 609,629 people returned, with women and girls making up 30 per cent of returnees.⁵³

These returns are unfolding against the backdrop of reduced international humanitarian aid, growing repression and a fragile economy. Focus group discussions conducted by the UN co-chaired Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group in Herat, Kandahar, and Nangarhar reveal widespread uncertainty among returnee women, many of whom expressed concern about accessing basic services and rebuilding their lives.⁵⁴ Risks of gender-based violence also appear to be increasing. At border crossings, women have reported instances of exploitation and harassment, adding to the stress and trauma of displacement and return. In provinces such as Kandahar, reports of early marriage and trafficking of young girls have increased.⁵⁵

Among those returning are women human rights defenders and former civic leaders who fled in the lead-up to, and immediate aftermath of, the August 2021 takeover. Human rights reporting indicates that some have faced threats linked to their past roles and affiliations, including arbitrary arrest, detention, and ill-treatment – such as torture – by the DFA.⁵⁶

Women's leadership and participation in refugee response will be critical to addressing these complex and overlapping crises. However, the ban on women NGO workers directly undermines the reach and effectiveness of response. Urgent, unhindered access for women to participate in the response is essential if Afghanistan is to navigate this period of unprecedented refugee flows.



Afghans queue in the hot sun for humanitarian assistance, after crossing the border with Iran. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell.

⁵² Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. 2025. [Gender Alert: Gendered Needs and Challenges of Afghans Returning from Iran and Pakistan](#) (June 2025).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ UNAMA Human Rights Service. 2025. [No safe haven: Human rights risks faced by persons involuntarily returned to Afghanistan](#).

THE SITUATION OF AFGHAN WOMEN IS NOT HOPELESS

Women in the Pamir Mountains in Badakhshan province, northeastern Afghanistan, 2024. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell

Afghan women remain the country's foremost agents of change. The international community must ensure that Afghan women's hope is not met with silence.

Here is what can be done to support Afghan women and girls build inclusive communities – and a country grounded in equality:⁵⁷

- 1.** Afghan women's civil society organizations are the backbone of resilience in Afghanistan. **Long-term, flexible funding** is crucial to help them navigate mounting repression.
- 2.** At least **30 per cent of all aid to Afghanistan must focus on gender equality**. Gender-blind funding is no longer an option – every programme must actively support the rights of Afghan women and girls.
- 3.** **No action or funding should inadvertently strengthen or normalize discriminatory DFA policies.** Thoughtful, deliberate action is needed to ensure that no intervention compounds the harm done to women and girls.
- 4.** **Women's rights must remain front and centre** in all humanitarian, basic human needs, rights, and political efforts, shaping every decision and action from the ground up to ensure lasting and meaningful change. Afghan must shape the future of Afghanistan – not be written out of it.

⁵⁷ These four actions are based on the principles set out in the UN Women [2024 Afghanistan Gender Country Profile](#).

ANNEX I: METHODOLOGY

This Gender Alert was compiled using data and analysis gathered through the consultation cycle undertaken jointly with UNAMA and IOM – and research initiatives. Below is a snapshot of the different methodological approaches for these processes.

2025 Gender Flagship Survey

Between February and March 2025, a nationwide primary data collection through individual interviews using Kobo. A total of 2,190 respondents (1,116 men and 1,074 women) participated across all regions of Afghanistan. Regional representation included Central (14%), East (12%), North-East (13%), North-West (13%), South-East (12%), South-West (19%), and West (18%). A total of 80.5 per cent of survey participants were from rural localities and 19.5 from urban localities, which is proportionate to the urban/rural divide in the country. The methodology ensured balanced gender and geographic coverage to support inclusive analysis and programming. Further details on the methodology are available upon request.

Monitoring the status of women in Afghanistan survey

The aim of this study is to collect quantitative data that can be disaggregated across various geographical (urban/peri-urban/rural) and identity markers (gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education) to better understand the situation for diverse women and men around the country, particularly vis-à-vis restrictions introduced by the Taliban since August 2021. The study also seeks to thoroughly examine the challenges they face, their safety concerns, mental health, and the impact on their lives of the DFA policies and practices across Afghanistan.

The sample for this study was designed to ensure representation at both the national and regional levels. In the first round, surveys were conducted with 5,309 women and 1,157 men using a random dialer methodology across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Random stratified sample in round 1, 95 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent margin of error at the provincial level for the female population, and on the regional level for the male population. Across the total sample, 44.3 per cent of respondents belonged to the urban population, 12.7 per cent peri-urban and 43.0 per cent rural. First round data was collected in August 2024 before the public announcement of the PVPV law.

The second round of data collection cited in this report was undertaken in October and November 2024. In this round, surveys were conducted with 3,022 women and 867 men from the first round using the callback method, reaching all 34 provinces (42.9% urban, 13.9% peri-urban, 43.2% rural). Random stratified sample in this round was 95 per cent confidence level and 10 per cent margin of error at the regional level for the female population, and 10 per cent margin of error at the regional level for the male population.

The third round was conducted in July and August 2025, approximately one year after the first round. Using the random dialer methodology, surveys were conducted with 2,872 women and 503 men, reaching all 34 provinces. Random stratified sample in this round was 95 per cent confidence level and 10 per cent margin of error at the regional level.

Consultation Cycle with UNAMA and IOM

Since August 2022, UN Women, UNAMA and IOM have undertaken a consultation cycle to understand the perceptions of Afghan women and their recommendations. Perceptions capture respondents' opinions, attitudes, beliefs and experiences related to issues affecting them, as a way to measure intangible or sensitive issues that are otherwise difficult to quantify.

Participants are selected through a purposive, snowballing methodology, to mitigate security risks and foster open discussions on sensitive issues. For more information on the detailed methodology can be found in the reports on previous consultations: [October 2024](#) (unpublished), [July 2024](#), [April 2024](#), [February 2024](#), [December 2023](#), [September 2023](#), [June 2023](#), [March 2023](#), and [August 2022](#).