



Studyguide

Committee: UN Women

Topic: Ensuring the rights of Women under the Taliban regime

Introduction into the Committee

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

About UN Women

UN Women is dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The council was established to meet women's needs worldwide and supports UN Member States to set 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. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.

Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls globally, UN Women's main roles are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Creation and structure

For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women according to UNGA resolution 64/289, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to address such challenges. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UN Women is governed as follows:

- GS, ECOSOC and Commission on the Status of Women constitute the intergovernmental governance structure for the normative support functions and shall provide normative policy guidance to the Entity;
- The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Executive Board constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for the operational activities and shall provide operational policy guidance to the Entity.

How it works

UN Women supports international political negotiations to formulate globally agreed standards for

gender equality, helps UN Member States to implement those standards by providing expertise and financial support, and assists other parts of the UN system in their efforts to advance gender equality across a broad spectrum of issues related to human rights and human development. Six fields in which it aims to promote gender equality are:

- **Innovation and Technology:** UN Women focuses on developing markets for innovations that advance gender equality; integrating gender issues within innovation; promoting women as innovators and entrepreneurs; and investing in technology-driven innovative solutions that meet the needs of women and girls.
- **Intergovernmental support:** UN Women supports Member States in setting norms, for example through country programmes. Moreover, it conducts research, and compiles and provides evidence, including good practices and lessons learned, to inform intergovernmental debates and decisions. Lastly, UN Women coordinates the UN system's work in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- **UN system coordination:** UN Women is mandated to lead, promote and coordinate efforts to advance the full realization of women's rights and opportunities. Towards these ends, UN Women helps strengthen effective UN action on the global, regional and national levels. The council helps bolstering capacities to make achieving gender equality central to programmes and policies, advocate for greater resources, and guide and implement joint development programmes. It supports measures upholding accountability for commitments to women, and has a key role in increasing knowledge about women's status in the United Nations.
- **Gender parity in the United Nations:** UN Women provides regular updates on the status of women in the UN system. This helps ensure the equal representation of women in the agendas of all UN organizations. Thirty-two UN entities encourage gender balance within their own organizations, many by drawing on UN Women's support.
- **Training for gender equality and women's empowerment:** It aims to provide knowledge, techniques and tools to develop skills and changes in attitudes and behaviours. Training is a tool, strategy, and means to effect individual and collective transformation towards gender equality. It helps women and men to understand the role gender plays and to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for advancing gender equality in their daily lives and work.
- **Research and data:** Our commitment to delivering the highest quality research and data gives us a place at the table at global and national policy debates, to help set the agenda and mobilize our partners to take action to advance gender equality and human rights for all.

Guiding documents

- **UN Women's strategic plan 2022-2025:** outlines UN Women's strategic direction, objectives and approaches to support efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It supports the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and contributes to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and the optional protocol. The "women's bill of rights" is a cornerstone of all UN Women programmes. More than 185 countries are parties to the Convention.
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA).** Adopted by governments at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, this document sets forth governments' commitments to enhance women's rights. Member states reaffirmed and strengthened the platform in 2000 during the global five-year review of progress, and were having reviews every five years since then.
- **UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000)** recognized that war impacts women differently, and reaffirmed the need to increase women's role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. The UN Security Council subsequently adopted seven additional resolutions on women, peace and security between 2008 and 2019. These resolutions represent a critical framework for improving the situation of women in conflict-affected countries.

- In September 2015, governments formulated new **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and 169 targets that aim to end poverty, combat inequalities and promote prosperity while protecting the environment by 2030.

Financial resources

Fund for Gender Equality: It is a multi-donor initiative which was created in 2009 with the purpose to support national, women-led civil society organisations in achieving women's economic and political empowerment at local and national levels and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It strengthened the capacities of 131 organisations and granted 65 million USD in 121 projects in 80 countries. These projects improved the lives of 570000 people and benefitted millions more through lasting changes to public policy.

UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women: Established in 1996 and administered by UN Women on behalf of the UN system, it awards grants to initiatives demonstrating that violence against women and girls (VAW/G) can be systematically addressed, reduced, and, with persistence, eliminated. It awarded 215 million USD to 646 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. It works with civil society organisations and women's rights organisations to prevent violence against women and girls, improve access to services and to strengthen implementation of laws, policies and action plans.

Resources: In 2022, UN Women had total resources of 544 million USD at their disposal. The fundings come from foundations, UN organisations, OECD-DAC and non-OECD-DAC donors, the private sector, NGO's, its own regular resources, and governments. Its main contributors in 2022 were Sweden, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, the USA, Finland and Norway. The resources are spent in four impact areas: governance and participation in public life, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction.

Introduction into the topic

In August 2021, after 20 years of war, the USA withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. Following the exit, the Taliban- a mostly Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist group- entered Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul and took control of the country on 15 August 2021. Their return to power affected all citizens. Especially the rights of women stripped away during less than two years. Though the Taliban initially promised to uphold minority and women's rights (for the latter within Sharia law and including the right to work and study), it quickly became evident that it would not happen. Since their takeover, the de facto government in Afghanistan has issued 80 edicts, and thereof 54 directly target women and girls. Among others:

- August 2021: The Taliban ordered women to stay at home because their foot soldiers were "not familiar with seeing women outside the house and were not trained to respect women".
- September 2021: Education for girls beyond the sixth grade is restricted. Women would be allowed to continue attending universities with some restrictions: Classrooms were segregated by gender, head-coverings were mandatory, and women were only allowed to take classes taught by other women or elderly men.
- March 2022: Schools were still closed due to the pandemic. In the following months, girls in sixth grade and above were told that they would eventually be able to return to school, however the government needed to ensure that they could do so in accordance with the Taliban's religious ideology. Schools were supposed to reopen in March. But only some hours later, the government cancelled classes for girls indefinitely.
- May 2022: Women must adhere to "appropriate dress", preferably by wearing a black robe with a face covering, or are not allowed to leave the house without a reason. Women must be covered from head to toe whenever they leave the home. If they violate these restrictions, their male guardians will be punished, maybe with jail.
- August 2022: Women in the civil service were asked to stay at home
- November 2022: Women are banned from parks, public baths, gyms, sports clubs and amuse-

ment parks.

- December 2022: Ban on the employment of women in aid organisations. Women's right to attend university "suspended" and all forms of education beyond sixth grade banned for girls.
- April 4, 2023: The Taliban extended the ban on Afghan women from in NGO's to those working in the United Nations
- June 2023: Order to close beauty salons (around 60,000 women working in the 12,000 or so salons lose their income).

The restrictions for women show themselves as follows:

Limited freedom of movement

Their ability to work outside of health and education is prohibited, women are banned from traveling long distances (over 78 kilometres) without a male chaperone, and unchaperoned women are increasingly denied access to essential services. The rules combined limit women's ability to earn a living, access health care and education, escape situations of violence, and exercise their rights. In practice, restrictions on women's freedom of movement often go beyond what is prescribed in the decrees to fully cover themselves and requiring a mahram to travel more than 78 kilometres. Women report that families, communities and employers limit movements of women and girls.

Lack of political representation

Women don't hold any cabinet positions in the de facto administration. Before 15 August 2021, 28 percent of parliamentarians were women. Despite the Taliban's initial assurance around an inclusive government and statements urging Afghan women to join the government, the Taliban structure is exclusively male. The de facto administration also abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs in September 2021- which eliminated women's right to political participation. It was followed by the abolishment of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in May 2022. The Taliban reinstated the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, tasked with enforcing the edicts issued to ensure compliance with the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law. A three day gathering on 30 June 2022 of around 4500 clerics and leaders chosen by the Taliban excluded women with the argument that they are sufficiently involved through their husbands, sons or fathers. Women were removed from public service position, except where they cannot be filled by men in education, health and elements of policing.

Invisibility in public life

Women's rights and women-led civil society organisations closed since 2021. In 2022, 77 percent of those organisations were not longer running any projects in 2022. And those that continue to operate face intimidation, threats, cash and banking issues and operational restrictions. On 8 September 2021, the de facto Ministry of Interior banned demonstrations that did not have prior permission. Nevertheless, women have been at the frontlines of the protests. and have been met with threats, violence and arrests. Women who fled the country mobilise to keep global attention of women's rights, for example through the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council. The Taliban issued various rules aiming at excluding women from public broadcasting. For example, on 21 May 2022, a nationwide order required women journalists to cover their face. On 21 November 2021, the broadcasting of drama, entertainment and music was restricted through guidelines. By the end of 2021, 43 percent of media outlets 84 percent of female journalists and media workers had stopped working. Social media provides a safer alternative space for women to advocate for women's rights. Although it provides one of the last remaining platforms for women, they still need to remain anonymous to avoid attention from the de facto authorities and to mitigate online harassment.

Limited access to education

Between the early 2000s and 2018, the school population registered an increase from less than 1 million to 9,2 million students (38 percent girls). Before August 2021, there were no directions in place barring girls from accessing secondary school. Girls could access all levels of education in all

provinces. Since the Taliban takeover, equal access to education changed dramatically for girls. As of November 2021, girls only have access to secondary schools in seven provinces. Since March 2022, no meaningful steps have been taken to reopen secondary schools for girls. These restrictions exclude 1.1 million girls from secondary education. Afghanistan is the only country that bans girls from attending secondary schools. Moreover, the absence of a national policy hampers universal access to education and confines women to their homes. Restrictions of women's freedom of movement and a lack of female teachers limit girls' access to education. Where girls are not in school there is an increased risk of exploitation and abuse, including child and forced marriage. Where universities could not implement gender-segregated guidelines, women were disadvantaged. Many women stopped attending or opted not to enrol in university. Pressure from family and community also contribute to girls opting out of university-level education. The lack of education and work lead to negative coping mechanisms in their communities and families, for example child labour, child marriage and displacement. Restrictions confine women to the home, and broadly contest their presence in public spaces. Before 15 August 2021, 17 percent of women participated in the labour force, it decreased by 16 percent by the end of October 2021. In remote and isolated rural areas, women play a key role in the agricultural sector. Therefore, restrictions on women's mobility will put communities at risk, many of them are already facing acute food insecurity. Restrictions of freedom of movement eliminate possibilities for employment for women-headed households. In January 2022, almost 100% of women-headed households faced insufficient food consumption, and 85% of these households reported drastic coping measures, like limiting food intake and borrowing food. The restrictions on education and labour for women and girls have led to a major economic and social crisis in Afghanistan. Women and girls are the hardest hit and suffer from pervasive poverty. The policies of the de facto authorities have led to an increase in domestic violence. Protection and health services are more difficult to access and the financial burden has increased. The exclusion of women from public space leaves them susceptible to further abuse in both public and private, without the legal or economic means to seek justice or protection. Women have always been subject to violence, but now under the Taliban, they have nowhere to turn. Many institutions that work to protect women's rights stopped their activities and closed.

Inaccessibility of healthcare

Health infrastructure and services are largely dependent on foreign aid. They were limited even before the Taliban takeover with deficits in rural and hard-to-reach areas. The freezing of international aid had a tremendous impact on the ability to run health services including those specialising in the health needs of women and girls. The health system is plagued by service gaps and inequalities, including lack of access in rural areas, shortages of staff and equipment, and limited specialized care for women. Male and female health workers are prohibited from communicating with each other and are limited to treating patients of the same gender as themselves. 86 percent of the staff in nutrition sites reported that there were no female nurses and 71% said that there were no female doctors. In early 2022, 10 percent of women said that they could cover their basic health needs (compared to 23% of men). Also, women do not have access to psychological help and informal community support is lacking due to the restrictions imposed. Maternal mortality rates were expected to rise due to restricted mobility for pregnant women, the rise of child marriage and associated likelihood of early pregnancy. Mental health outcomes arise due to economic stressors, lack of support services, displacement, social trauma and exposure to a conflict. In 2022, 72 percent of households reported a behavioural change in at least one household member. Stressors for women include especially a sense of hopelessness given their lack of political and social possibilities. Many Afghan women face a deep mental health crisis. More than two thirds of Afghan women report that they do not feel physically safe, and around 90 percent that their mental health including feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression was bad or very bad. Women emphasised a sense of disappointment and hopelessness due to their lack of opportunities, particularly given secondary school and university closings. Such feelings were significantly worse for urban women. However, mental health support is unavailable to women.

Need for humanitarian assistance

In 2022, 24,4 million people, including 5,5 million women and 6,3 million girls, were in need of humanitarian assistance. Around 7400 people were displaced in 2022, thereof 80 percent are women and children. Obstacles to women's access to humanitarian assistance come from the mobility and social restrictions, lack of civil documentation and the risk of gender-based violence.

Displacement soared in Afghanistan following the rise of the Taliban. In September 2021, the number of internally displaced people reached 5,5 million people, and more than 500000 became refugees who fled across borders. Approximately 80% of Afghans who were forced to flee were women and children who have a higher risk of discrimination and violence.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Violence against women and girls is a pervasive problem. Even before 15 August 2021, rates of violence against women and girls were already extremely high. According to current statistics, 87 percent of Afghan women and girls experience abuse in their lifetime. With the Taliban takeover, access to services for VAWG survivors deteriorated, while the needs for these services increased. Nearly nine out of ten women have experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence. Since August 2021, infrastructure to seek support in addressing VAWG was dismantled, and the remaining institutions were presented dangers for women. The restrictions of freedom of movement, the erosion of women's rights and growing male hegemony meant that people feel more entitled to perpetrate violence against women and girls. The system aiming to provide support and justice to survivors of VAWG has collapsed. Personnel qualified to deal with VAWG have been removed or fled the country, and civil society organisations have largely been shut down. Access to justice for women is almost non-existent. Court cases of violence against women were increasingly diverted to informal justice mechanisms who do not have a survivor-centred approach and lack safeguards for fair processes. Furthermore, dependence on male relatives for financial means and travel limit opportunities for reporting domestic violence. If reporting occurs, women and girls risk arrest and prosecution for so-called moral crimes. The increasingly dangerous situation for women has contributed to an increase of suicides among women. Child and forced marriages increased since 2021. Drivers include economic pressure, lack of education and employment for girls, and the practice among Taliban officials of forcibly marrying women and girls themselves. Girls who are forced into marriage face an increased risk of VAWG by their husbands and in-laws.

Lack of representation in the legal system

The justice system has in large part been dismantled to the disadvantage of women and girls. Institutional safeguards ensuring fair trials and monitoring bodies have been dissolved. With a lack of institutional oversight and no clarity on the applicable legal framework, individual interpretation of the law increased. In a male-dominated society, women's rights are at greater risk. Former women judges, lawyers and prosecutors largely fled and were replaced almost entirely by former Taliban fighters and Islamic school graduates who do not automatically have legal training or expertise. The lack of women's representation and legally trained personnel in the justice system hinders access to justice for women and girls. There is an increasing reliance on informal justice. Its courts refer in family law cases to informal dispute-resolution mechanisms, which poses issues for women and other marginalised groups.

Unemployment of women and less influence

In the aftermath of the 24 December 2022 ban, 94 percent of the national organisations either fully or partly erased operations. Women made up between 30 and 45 percent of international staff in international NGOs, so the ban was significant. Around two thirds of the organisations said that their activities were directly affected by the ban. Education and protection (e. g. gender-based violence) were primarily impacted. It cut women out of the last remaining sector where they were highly visible and could continue to hold leadership positions. Two thirds of the organisations reported that over 70 percent were the main breadwinners in their families. If female NGO workers are pushed

out of their employment, most organisations that they will be forced to fully or partially cease operations. Three quarters of organisations said that they still paid the salaries of the female staff, but almost all said that if the ban remains in place, the affected women would not be able to find another job. 84 percent of the organisations anticipated that they would need to lay off female staff as they would be unable to pay their salaries.

The unemployment of women makes their influence in decision-making diminish, worsens relationships with male family members and increases domestic violence. It was described to be a shift when women seek now alternative income-generating activities at home and pursuing vocational training.

In June 2023, only half of the Afghan women said that they have full or good influence in their household. At the beginning of the year it were 90 percent. Especially rural women feel less influence in their household. More than one third feels this in the wider families, three quarters in their communities, and at the provincial and national it is 81 or 89 percent.

Deteriorating interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relations between Afghan men and women are fracturing. In June 2023, almost two thirds of the Afghan women said that relationships with men in their communities worsened in the last three months. Almost 40 percent said that the relationships with male family members worsened. Almost half of the Afghan women felt that the relationships with Afghan women outside their families deteriorated. Almost half of the Afghan women meet other women less than once per month or never.

Some statistics for 2022

GENDER GAP

- Afghanistan is ranked 156th out of 156 countries by the Global Gender Gap Index 2021

HUMANITARIAN

- Numbers in need of humanitarian assistance
- January 2021: 18.4 million people - including 4.1 million women and 4.7 million girls.
- January 2022: 24.4 million people – 5.5 million women and 6.3 million girls.
- January 2022: 85 percent of women-headed households turning to negative coping strategies, compared with 62 percent of male-headed households.

WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY

- Approximately 77 percent of Afghan women civil society organizations had no funding and are no longer running any projects in 2022.

EDUCATION

- Girls graduating: In 2021, 22,375 (or 12.5 percent out of 179,000) female secondary school students took the national university entrance exam.
- Girls out of school: As of April 2022, 80 percent of secondary school girls (850,000 out of 1.1 million in 2021) were prevented from attending classes.

EMPLOYMENT

- In 2020, women made up 18.8 percent of the employment sector (compared with 81.2 percent for men). This may have already decreased by as much as 28 percent (compared with a 12 percent decrease for men).
- Unemployment rate: 13 percent in 2021, estimated to reach up to 40 percent in 2022

Historical context of Women's rights in Afghanistan

In the pre-islamic time, the Afghan history spans any religions and cultures, shaped by the tribal ta-

pestry of its inhabitants and occupying empires. Specific records of contribution to women's rights can not be explicitly recorded. There have some prominent women, however most women had not the same level of freedom as men. In the 19th century, women's rights were limited and traditional societal attitudes towards women's roles and rights persisted. Women had limited access to education and employment, were largely confined to domestic roles. They were subject to discriminatory laws and practices, such as forced marriage of young girls and the denial of inheritance rights. In the 20th century, especially before 1979, Afghan women's level of freedom was comparable to women in other countries. They gained suffrage in 1919. Afterwards, Amanullah Khan, the king of Afghanistan, introduced significant reforms. His wife, Queen, Soraya Tarzi, played a big role in opening the first school in Afghanistan in 1920. In 1950, Afghanistan abolished the purdah system, which enforced strict gender segregation and veiling practices. This granted women more personal and social freedoms and allowed them to participate more actively in public life. Since the 1960's women's rights expanded, and the progress continued in the 1970's. In 1964, the constitution of Afghanistan was adopted that focused on women's rights. In that time, greater equality was emphasized in the constitution. But in 1978, the president was killed in a Communist coup. The Soviets invaded in 1979, after which the Americans and Soviets backed different sides in Afghanistan's civil war. In the meantime, religious extremist groups gained bigger control of the country and women feared restrictions on their freedom. The communist era lasted from 1978-1992. Some progress was made in terms of women's rights, such as the right to education and employment. In 1991, 7,000 women enrolled in higher education, 230,000 girls were in schools, 190 women were professors, and 22,000 women taught in schools across the country. However, the situation for women remained difficult, with widespread violence. The conflict between Mujahedeen groups, government forces and others from the 1970's became a turning point, when progress for women's rights in Afghanistan started to become undone. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1992 until 1996, several Mujahedeen factions fought for control in Afghanistan. In that time, women's rights were not a priority. Many women lost the right to education and employment, were forced to wear burqas and were not allowed to leave their home without a male guardian. The Taliban first emerged in 1994, and seized control of Afghanistan for the first time in 1996. They imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Under Taliban rule, freedoms for women were rolled back. They were barred from attending school, working, leaving the house without a chaperone and speaking publicly. By the end of the Taliban's first rule in 2001, less than one million Afghan children were in school, and none of them were girls. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the USA and its allies invaded Afghanistan. Following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, a new constitution was adopted that provided equal rights for women. However, the progress in women's rights was still rather slow, and many women faced violence, discrimination, barriers in terms of access to education and employment and social barriers, such as the persistence of traditional attitudes towards women's roles and rights. In the following years, several laws were enacted: Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2003. A new constitution in the year 2004 enshrined gender equality and reserved 27 per cent of seats in parliament for women. Between 2001 and 2021, rights were expanded: girls attended school, women had jobs and the government enshrined women's rights in the constitution. In 2005, the Afghan parliament passed a law on the Elimination of Violence against women that criminalised certain forms of violence against women. In 2013, the government developed a comprehensive strategy to improve the status of women. It aimed to eliminate violence against women, promote their access to justice, improve women's economic empowerment, and increase women's participation in political and public life. While it was an important step forward, its implementation was hindered by a lack of political will and insufficient resources. Despite difficulties, it helped increase the number of women in decision-making positions, and provide more access to education, healthcare and justice of women. By 2021, Afghan women had secured 69 out of 249 seats in parliament, women were negotiating peace across the country, and laws were in place allowing women to include their names on their children's birth certificates and identification cards. There was a Ministry of Women's Affairs, an independent human rights commission, and a law-making violence against women a crime. But more than this, women were

visible- from law, politics, and journalism, to sidewalks, parks, and schools. Since the withdrawal of international troops in 2021, the Taliban regained significant territory and influence in Afghanistan.

International reactions

United States of America

The USA condemns in the strongest terms the Taliban's decision to ban women from universities and secondary schools and to impose restriction of Afghan women to exercise their human rights and freedoms. The Taliban's repressive edicts have resulted in restrictions on Afghan women. Moreover, women and girls face enormous difficulties seeking employment to feed their families. Afghanistan is already losing more than 1 billion USD per year in contributions that women could make to the economy. The USA will continue to provide support to the Afghan people, including women, to seek to meet their humanitarian needs. On 12th August 2022, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) announced a 30 million USD commitment to support gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan which will be programmed through UN Women. This funding reaffirms the US government's commitment to stand with Afghan women and girls as they fight to enjoy human rights and opportunities.

European Union

In December 2022 and March 2023, the Council of the EU strongly condemned the restrictions on women's rights by the Taliban and sees their ban of women to work a violation of international human rights law. The EU called on the de facto authorities to „honour Afghanistan's obligations under international law“ and to ensure respect for human rights. The EU calls upon the Taliban to deliver on their promises and prove their ability to respect and protect the human rights and provide basic services to the whole population of Afghanistan. The EU is committed to stay engaged and to deliver assistance for the benefit of the Afghan population. Moreover, the EU stressed that the Taliban's treatment of women may be a crime against humanity under the Rome statute. Moreover, the European Parliament took steps to ensure that Afghan women's voices are heard. Its Subcommittee on Human Rights organised the Afghan Women's Day, enabling Afghan women to share their analyses and recommendations with EU representatives and the UN.

Pakistan

Since the 1970's Pakistan has hosted over eight million Afghans- Many of them returned to Afghanistan or migrated to other countries. Today, there are over four million Afghans in Pakistan. Thereof, more than 2,2 millions have some form of documentation, and approximately 1,7 millions more are undocumented. Many came after the Taliban retook Afghanistan in 2021, but many have been present since the 1979 Soviet invasion. Registered Afghan refugees are allowed to attend schools and universities, but the status of the undocumented Afghans is precarious. The Pakistani government decreed on 15 September 2024 that undocumented immigrants would need to leave the country. Since 1st November, when the police went into force, over 400000 Afghans left Pakistan to their home country. About 80 percent of these people are women and children. In early September, fewer than 300 people per day crossed the border to enter Afghanistan.

Other Muslim countries

Turkey and Saudi Arabia have strongly condemned the Taliban's nationwide ban on women to attend universities. Turkey's Foreign Minister said that the ban was „neither Islamic nor humane“ and urged the Taliban to reverse the decision. The Saudi foreign ministry expressed „astonishment and regret“ at Afghan women being denied a university education. They condemned the decision after Qatar already did so, who served as a mediator between the United States and the Taliban. Qatar hosted Taliban leaders to discuss peace efforts since 2011 which culminated in a deal in 2020.

UN's role and activities

The United Nations has been involved in Afghanistan since 1946 when Afghanistan joined the General Assembly. Agencies (e. g. UNICEF) have been working in Afghanistan since 1949.

UN bodies' presence in Afghanistan

UN Assistance Mission

The United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) is a UN Social Political Mission tasked with assisting the people in Afghanistan. It was established on 28 March 2002 by the UN Security Council Resolution 1401. Its resolution 2678 (2023) extended its mission. This mandate tasks UNAMA with the promotion and support of humanitarian assistance, human rights, equality for women and girls, inclusive governance, resilience, and economic stability.

UNESCO

UNESCO has been strongly involved in supporting the education system in Afghanistan during the last 20 years, including running a literacy programme that reached more than 600,000 young people and adults. 60% of the beneficiaries were women. Since August, 2021, UNESCO shifted its interventions to ensure continuity of education through community-based literacy and skills development classes for over 25,000 youth and adults, including 60% women and adolescent girls in 20 provinces. Its advocacy campaign "Literacy for a Brighter Future" reached out to over 20 million Afghans to increase public awareness of the right to education for youth and adults, especially women and adolescent girls. UNESCO is also working on an education data monitoring initiative to ensure reliable data so that education partners channel funding to the most critical and unmet education needs.

UN Women

UN Women has been working in Afghanistan since 2002 (as UNIFM until 2010), and has been supporting the development, monitoring and implementation of policies that protect and promote the rights of women, for example the adoption of a quota in the national constitutions or laws and policies to combat violence against women at the national and local level. Its programmes focus in particular on protection and prevention of violence against women, leadership and economic empowerment. UN Women provides financial and technical support to help strengthen women's machineries and works to promote sustainable change at all levels. Its activities include:

- Through its **Ending Violence against Women Special Fund**, UN Women funds 11 Women's Protection Centres and five Family Guidance Centres in nine provinces. The latter give women survivors of violence and their children a safe space to shelter and legal space, health checks, psychosocial support and vocational training. UN Women launched the HeForShe campaign in Afghanistan in June 2015, working to change the attitudes and behaviours, especially of boys and men that encourage violence against women and girls.
- UN Women works to promote institutional accountability for legal frameworks on women's empowerment, including reporting against the international treaties that Afghanistan is party to. It supports national legal reforms processes, including the **Ending Violence against Women Law and Family Law**. In collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, UN Women works with six ministries on the implementation of the **Anti-Harassment Regulation**.
- UN Women works with civil servants, high school and university graduates to build their capacity through developing their **leadership, management, English language, and ICT skills**, and offering scholarship and internship opportunities. UN Women also supports women entrepreneurs in gaining better access to markets, and rural women to undertake livelihood development activities.
- UN Women supports MPs in bringing gender perspectives into legislative debates and outputs and developing their capacity as decision-makers. UN Women supports **training for elected female political leaders** to help strengthen their leadership and communication skills and to build robust constituency relations.

- UN Women works together with the Ministry of Finance to support six ministries in undertaking a detailed **assessment of their budgets**, followed by capacity building to make the **ministries' budgets more gendered**.
- UN Women provides **leadership and technical guidance** through several mechanisms designed to bring together many stakeholders in order to support gender-responsive programming. In Afghanistan, it includes chairing sessions in working groups and acting as the permanent secretariat for the Women Peace and Security Working Group.
- The **Survivors Empowerment Journey programme** is implemented in partnership with Afghanistan's government and takes a holistic approach to empower female survivors of violence. It employs protection services and economic empowerment, fosters and enabling environment for community level prevention and legal reform. It brings together threads from each of UN Women's programmatic areas in Afghanistan, in order to help survivors escape the violence, rebuild their lives and access justice.

UN bodies' resolutions

On **17th September 2021**, the **UN Security Council** adopted a resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, the resolution emphasises the importance of the establishment of an inclusive and representative government and highlights the importance of upholding human rights, including women, children and minorities.

On **27th April 2023**, the **UN Security Council** adopted a resolution in which it condemned the Taliban to ban Afghan women from working for the United Nations in Afghanistan as it would undermine human rights and humanitarian principles. The organ called for the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and girls in Afghanistan. It also called on the Taliban to reverse its policies and practices restricting women's and girls' enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including education, employment, freedom of movement and participation in public life. The Council reiterated its demand that all parties allow humanitarian access for the personnel of the Organisation's humanitarian agencies.

On **1st July 2023**, the **UN Human Rights Council** held an urgent debate on the human rights of women and girls. In its resolution, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all women, girls and children in Afghanistan, including freedom of movement, education, enjoyment of the highest standard of physical and mental (including sexual and reproductive) health, the right to work and access to justice on an equal base with others.

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund

The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund is channeling financing to women's organisations. It supports Afghan women, civil society leaders and their organisations in the country and region to sustain the work in the face of human rights violations against women and girls. Its main goals are advancing progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and protecting their safety, security, and human rights. It also supports women's organisations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan to promote socio-recovery, participation and leadership of displaced Afghan women and girls. More than three million USD will be granted to Afghanistan between December 2023 and December 2026.

Possible solutions

Legal support

- The International Criminal Court was authorized to resume the investigation of crimes committed in Afghanistan. Member States should ensure that the court has the necessary resources and cooperation to fulfill its mandate.
- States can bring an action the International Court of Justice against another state over the interpretation or application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Humanitarian aid and funding

- Out of more than 150 NGO's and UN agencies operating in Afghanistan, 75 percent report that the Taliban negatively affected their ability to provide humanitarian aid. Therefore, aid organisations must have safe and unrestricted access to deliver essential services which Afghan women and girls need to be able to access.
- Donors should boost humanitarian aid in order to fund women-led Afghan aid organisations, Afghan organizations working to uphold human rights, programmes that address women's rights and empowerment, and programs bringing remote education and employment opportunities to Afghan girls and women.
- Programmes for Specific Populations: humanitarian aid must also serve the most at-risk populations in Afghanistan. It includes displaced, Hazara or Shia women and girls.

Raising Afghan women's voices

- Afghan women's voices can be raised e. g. by publishing reports about Afghan women's rights activists and organisations which work in the country and share experiences of women who lost their freedom
- Integrating the policy perspectives of Afghan women by supporting them to negotiate directly and meaningfully with the Taliban. This includes engaging with the Taliban in ways that reinforce the priorities of Afghan women and the immediate restoration of their fundamental freedoms and rights.

Psychological support

- Organisations working in Afghanistan can form learning and forming support networks to help rebuild women's lives, families and communities. There, the participating women can lean on each other and trained women in the programme can give them psychological first aid to cope with the trauma and stress.
- Creating possibilities through the international community to give Afghan women online psychological support

Gender based violence prevention

Safe houses and women's protection centres have become increasingly inaccessible as the Taliban either closed or occupied most of them. Humanitarian responders must provide GBV services.

- Donors should fund requests to support GBV prevention and response programming.
- Donors should fund frontline organisations that ensure female staff are meaningfully and safely engaged in the humanitarian response.
- Female staff are necessary to mitigate risks of GBV and to provide healthcare including sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Supporting women in generating money

- Investments through organisations and the International community in order to:
 - provide Afghan women and girls the opportunity to engage in home-based and online income-generating, vocational and educational initiatives
 - support women-led businesses and employment opportunities for women in all sectors

Resettlement programmes

- Increase opportunities for women and girls to relocate or resettle outside Afghanistan, including through scholarship and resettlement programmes.

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