



Projections for Afghan women and girls: “We hope we will not be left alone to fight for our rights”

Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell

What’s the issue?

Afghanistan has emerged as the largest women’s rights crisis in the world. Still, Afghan women and girls continue to have limited access to international and national decision-making forums.

Before August 2021, Afghan women were excluded from 80 per cent of peace negotiations. The negotiations for the Doha agreement in 2020 excluded Afghan women and did not contain a single reference to or safeguard women’s rights. Since August 2021, the Taliban have put in place over 50 restrictions, bans and decrees regulating the lives and bodies of Afghan women and girls; none have been reversed to date.

Despite these restrictions, Afghan women have not given up fighting for their right to live full lives, equal in dignity. Afghan women are still forming civil society organizations, still running businesses, and still providing services to their communities; most importantly, Afghan women have continued to find ways to make their demands to the international community clear. The below brief summarizes what Afghan women expect the international community to do to support their global fight for women’s rights.

What do Afghan women say?

About the restrictions impacting their lives

- **60 per cent** of Afghan women consider international recognition of the Taliban should only happen if *all* restrictions on the rights of women and girls are reversed or not happen at all.
- **81 per cent** of Afghan women had to skip a meal in the last two weeks.

- **57 per cent** of Afghan women felt unsafe leaving the house without a *mahram*.
- In the past year, the decision-making power of Afghan women in their own homes decreased by **58 per cent**.
- **82 per cent** of Afghan women consider their mental health is bad.
- Afghan women described the intergenerational impact of the Taliban restrictions. Boys are internalizing the social and political subordination of their mothers and sisters, reinforcing a belief that they should remain in the home in a position of servitude.

Why does it matter?

For the future of Afghanistan and the world

Future projections - the bans on education. Afghanistan remains the only country in the world that bans girls from going to school beyond grade six as a matter of policy. Afghan women are also banned from attending university.

If these restrictions put in place by the Taliban on the right to education remain in place, statistical projections estimate associations with the:

- Rate of **child marriage** among Afghan girls **increasing by 25 per cent**.
- Rate of **early childbearing** among Afghan adolescent girls **increasing by 45 per cent**.
- Risk of **maternal mortality** among Afghan girls and women **increasing by at least 50 per cent**.

Future projections – political dialogue on Afghanistan

Pursuing an intra-Afghan dialogue emerged as one of the key recommendations of the Special Coordinator's [independent assessment](#). The below outlines what Afghan women want from any future dialogue process:

- **Diversity in representation** was foundational to the concept of inclusion for Afghan women. Understandings of diversity extended to all segments of the population – women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities.
- **The perspectives and voices of women** have been deemed crucial for reaching lasting and inclusive solutions. Afghan women asked for the establishment of permanent structures that allow for women's participation, such as selecting their own representatives or strengthening capacities for political engagement.
- **Transparency and accountability** were highlighted as vital to the legitimacy of any governance structure, with the active involvement of citizens in the selection of representatives and decision-making processes as the two most common areas of concern flagged by Afghan women.

What do Afghan women want the international community to do?

- Afghan women **asked the international community to remain focused on the situation in Afghanistan** and to restore women's rights, including the rights to education and work, in addition to women's participation in public decision-making.
- Afghan women **asked the international community to consistently ensure their representation** at the international level – as the Taliban cannot be considered to represent any Afghan women. Forty-two per cent of women consulted in January 2024 asked for the international community to "facilitate for women to talk directly with the Taliban".
- Afghan women **asked the international community not to recognize the Taliban** unless they reverse restrictions on women and girls. They viewed recognition before tangible progress on women's rights as the worst-case scenario for their lives and the future of Afghanistan.
- Afghan women **asked the international community to ensure the leadership and participation of Afghan women and girls in delivering aid**, across all phases of the process – underscoring the importance of retracting all bans impacting the ability of women to work.
- Afghan women **asked the international community to prioritize and increase funding to initiatives that invest in women**, from skills enhancement to awareness raising on women's rights.

Methodology

A core element of the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda is putting women at the centre of national and international decision-making processes. In the context of Afghanistan, UN Women has been operationalizing the women, peace, and security agenda by facilitating multiple tracks of dialogues for the international community with a range of Afghan women to ensure their voices and policy perspectives on the future of Afghanistan and international policymaking are heard.

Analysis presented in this document is based on:

- UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have undertaken quarterly consultations with diverse Afghan women since August 2022. In January 2024, consultations reached over 700 Afghan women across all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.
- UN Women launched a submissions process on 3 February 2024 to gather the views of Afghan women for upcoming international policy making, including discussions on the Special Coordinator's [independent assessment](#) and UN Security Council resolution [2721](#) (2023). Between 3-11 February 2024, 75 submissions were processed.
- Statistical modelling was undertaken according to figures from the UN Sustainable Development Goals database. It uses global population-level indicators and interprets them within a framework of cross-country linear regression modelling.

[The women's rights crisis in Afghanistan cannot be seen in isolation. Excluding Afghan women from decision-making forums not only deprives Afghanistan of any chance of emerging out of crises, but it also signals to all oppressors of women anywhere that attacking women and their rights, silencing their voices, and erasing them from society not only goes unpunished but also easily becomes normalized.](#)