

# Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan

## A Remaining Window of Opportunity



### A Shrinking Space for Afghan Women

UN Women Afghanistan Country Office  
February, 2025



Afghanistan's economic landscape is deteriorating, with soaring poverty rates and increasing isolation from global markets. One of the most significant barriers to recovery is the systematic exclusion of women from the workforce. Restrictive policies have marginalized Afghan women, leading to a **GDP contraction of 2.5% (\$500 million) in the first year<sup>1</sup>** of de facto authority. Now, even though GDP has experienced mild growth, it has only recovered about 10% of the past economic losses<sup>2</sup>. If these restrictions persist, the economy is projected to shrink by \$9.6 billion by 2066<sup>3</sup>.

Women-owned enterprises are 3.5 times more likely to shut down due to economic shocks<sup>4</sup>, with **70% operating informally<sup>5</sup>**, depriving them of essential financial services. Afghan women's **labor force participation dropped to 4.8% in 2023**, compared to 69.1% for men<sup>6</sup>. The gender gap in internet access also remains stark—only **6% of women have internet access**, compared to 25% of men<sup>7</sup>. These systemic barriers are reinforced by climate-induced disasters and digital exclusion, increasing displacement risks for women.

### Why UN Women?

#### A Proven Model for Impact

UN Women recognizes that restricting women's work reinforces poverty, weakens community resilience, and threatens peace. Our interventions **directly support economic survival** while **enabling Afghan women** to be part of decision-making processes that shape their communities.

UN Women stands at the forefront of advocating for Afghan women's rights and economic inclusion. Our approach goes beyond aid—we equip women with the **resources, skills, and networks** to drive lasting change. We strengthen the capacities of women-led businesses, provide financial literacy training, and foster innovative partnerships to dismantle systemic barriers.

# Women's Economic Empowerment

## The Foundation for Humanitarian and Peace Efforts



Our commitment to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is built on strategic interventions that foster economic resilience, drive long-term sustainability, and challenge restrictive norms.



Photo: UN Women



In 2024, **12,716 women** received direct economic support, including **5,010 women entrepreneurs** who gained access to finance, equipment, and digital markets. UN Women also revived five women-only markets in Bamiyan and Balkh. Through these initiatives **45,090 people** benefited indirectly.

Partnerships with 60 private sector entities resulted in **4,845 new jobs for women**. Tailored training ensures long-term employability, focusing on market expansion and sustainable employment opportunities.

**2,732 women** in handicrafts, tailoring, and farming received targeted support through income-generative initiatives in 2024. **600 women entrepreneurs** accessed financing through 30 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), generating \$29,138 in savings and \$34,314 in loans for business expansion.

UN Women continues to **advocate for women's access to business** hubs, cooperatives, and international markets. By enabling participation in global exhibitions, we help shift societal perceptions and demonstrate women's economic value.

## Economic Inclusion as a Pillar of Stability

WEE is the foundation for humanitarian aid, resilience, and long-term peacebuilding in Afghanistan. By ensuring women can work, own businesses, and access markets, we pave the way for social inclusion and stability.

Our **Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy** ensures:

- **Women's Entrepreneurship:** Access to finance, skills, and markets through safe spaces like women-only markets.
- **Women's Employment:** Job-readiness training, apprenticeships, and private-sector job placements.
- **Digital Innovation and Climate-Resilient Livelihoods:** Supporting women's adoption of technology and climate-smart business models.
- **Contributing to Long-Term Normative and Policy Shifts:** Advocating for the economic value of women's participation to influence local attitudes and foster lasting change.

### A Call to Action: Stand with Afghan Women

Now, more than ever, **Investing in Afghan women is essential for economic recovery, peacebuilding, and community resilience.** By supporting UN Women's initiatives, donors and partners can help build a future where Afghan women thrive—leading economic progress and social transformation.

**Together, we can make Women's Economic Empowerment a catalyst for lasting change.**

### Sources:

- [1] UNICEF. 2022. *Depriving girls of secondary education translates to a loss of at least US\$500 million for Afghan economy in last 12 months.*
- [2] World Bank. *Afghanistan Overview*
- [3] UNESCO. 2024. *Costs of continued suspension of women's access to higher education and work in Afghanistan.*
- [4] World Bank. 2024. *Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey (round 3).*
- [5] UNDP. 2024. *Listening to Women Entrepreneurs in Afghanistan.*
- [6] World Bank. *Afghanistan | World Bank Gender Data Portal*
- [7] UN Women. 2024. *Afghanistan gender country profile 2024*