

Afghanistan in Reverse: A Human Story of Broken Hopes and Stalled Development

Status of Women and Girls under the Humanitarian Crisis in Afghanistan



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Overview of AWPLN

In November 2021, the Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders Network (AWPLN) was founded by a group of Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders (including those in the judiciary and those operating with and for federal and province ministries) forced to resettle outside of Afghanistan following their evacuation from the country in August and September 2021, subsequent to the Taliban retaking control of Afghanistan. Many of these women leaders resettled in Greece, where they organized and registered their organization in Fall of 2022, and then resettled in Canada where they registered their organization in April of 2023. AWPLN operates as a network of women leaders largely outside of Afghanistan who, prior to Taliban rule, led policies and programs to support gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan.

The women of AWPLN continue to operate with a sense of great responsibility to the people of Afghanistan, especially women and girls, with the goal of elevating their voices to the international community. Under re-established Taliban rule came reinstatement and expansion of policies that systematically excluded women and girls from public life, including:

- Banning secondary and higher education for girls and women
- Prohibiting most employment outside limited sectors (e.g., health)
- Enforcing strict dress codes and male-guardian requirements
- Restricting movement, speech, and access to public spaces

The women of AWPLN stand against these injustices and seek to have a positive influence on Afghan women, girls, and families by advocating and lobbying for equitable and just living conditions.

AWPLN Mission

AWPLN's mission is to equip women with knowledge and skills so that they excel as professionals and entrepreneurs, and earn a livelihood with dignity and self-sufficiency, well resettled and integrated. We believe that when women are socially and economically empowered, society is free of discrimination, and gender equality principle is accepted, women become catalysts of change not just in their own lives, but also in their families and communities.

AWPLN Vision

AWPLN is driven by the vision of a world where all women and children around the world, including the women and girls of Afghanistan, enjoy full citizenship regardless of their background, earn a livelihood with dignity, and live in a just and discrimination-free society.

Executive Summary

Afghanistan is facing a profound humanitarian and human rights crisis marked by economic collapse, widespread poverty, deteriorating health and education systems, environmental shocks, and the systematic exclusion of women and girls from public life. These challenges are not isolated. They reinforce one another and have collectively eroded household survival, community resilience, and prospects for recovery. Women and girls are bearing the greatest burden, as millions of Afghans forcibly returned from neighboring countries face renewed insecurity, poverty, and risk of persecution.

This report, prepared by the Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders Network (AWPLN) in collaboration with the Newcomb Institute at Tulane University, provides an integrated, evidence-based assessment of Afghanistan's current situation, centering the lived realities of women and girls. It combines population-level data with testimonies from Afghan women to document how economic collapse, humanitarian deprivation, forced return, and gender-based exclusion intersect as part of a single, multidimensional crisis.

Key findings show that Afghanistan's economy has contracted sharply since 2021, with more than 85% of the population living in poverty and over half requiring humanitarian assistance. Livelihoods have collapsed, inflation has reduced purchasing power, and reliance on aid has increased rather than declined. Women have been disproportionately affected due to formal and informal bans on employment, resulting in extreme gender disparities in income, labor force participation, and leadership.

Basic needs remain unmet for millions. Food insecurity affects more than a quarter of the population, while access to clean water and sanitation remains severely limited, particularly in rural areas. Families increasingly rely on harmful coping strategies, including child labor and early marriage. Agriculture, once a key source of livelihoods, remains underdeveloped and highly vulnerable to climate shocks.

Health outcomes are among the worst globally. Maternal, newborn, and child mortality remain alarmingly high, driven by limited access to healthcare, malnutrition, preventable disease, and shortages of female health workers. Mental health needs—especially among women, children, and returnees—are rising, while services remain extremely limited.

Education for women and girls has undergone a near-total reversal. Afghanistan is now the only country in the world where girls are officially banned from secondary and higher education. Millions of girls are out of school, adult female literacy remains extremely low due to longstanding poor access to girl education, and opportunities for skills training and livelihoods development are largely absent—creating long-term losses in human capital.

A rapidly escalating crisis involves Afghans being forcibly returned from Iran and Pakistan, including women activists, journalists, and former government employees. Many face investigation, detention, and violence upon return, alongside extreme economic hardship

and loss of education for their children. Humanitarian support for returnees is minimal, placing additional strain on already fragile communities.

Climate change and environmental degradation further compound vulnerability. Recurrent droughts, floods, and earthquakes have destroyed homes, farmland, and infrastructure, particularly affecting rural and displaced populations. Limited institutional capacity constrains adaptation and disaster preparedness.

The testimonies of Afghan women and girls presented in this report underscore the human cost of these intersecting crises. They reveal deep suffering, but also resilience, agency, and an urgent demand for rights, dignity, and opportunity. Their voices make clear that fragmented or sector-specific responses are insufficient.

Recommendations call on donor governments, humanitarian actors, and international partners to:

1. Sustain and scale flexible humanitarian assistance;
2. Prioritize protection and support for women, girls, and deportees;
3. Address forced return as an urgent humanitarian and protection crisis;
4. Invest in livelihoods, climate resilience, and community-based support;
5. Maintain human rights monitoring and accountability; and
6. Preserve pathways for future recovery by supporting Afghan human capital.

Even under current constraints, principled engagement can save lives, reduce harm, and preserve hope. The Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders Network urges the international community not to disengage, but to act decisively in solidarity with the women, girls, and families of Afghanistan—now and for the long term.

Chapter 1. Background on Afghanistan and Purpose of the Report

Afghanistan is facing a deepening humanitarian and human rights crisis shaped by prolonged conflict, economic collapse, and the systematic erosion of safety and opportunity—particularly for women and girls. Nearly five decades of recurrent armed conflict and political instability have weakened institutions, disrupted livelihoods, and left the population highly vulnerable to economic, health, and security shocks [1–3]. These vulnerabilities intensified sharply following the political transition in 2021, producing intersecting crises that now define daily life across the country [1,2,4].

Economic decline, shrinking livelihoods, and reduced humanitarian access have undermined household stability and coping capacity [1,3]. At the same time, Afghanistan continues to face severe challenges related to population health, nutrition, and access to basic services, reflecting long-standing underinvestment compounded by recent political and economic shocks [3,4]. These challenges do not occur in isolation; they intersect with entrenched gender inequalities that shape who bears risk, who can access services, and who is excluded from opportunities [4,5].

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the structural change in the Afghanistan government. Longstanding gender inequities have been reinforced by expanding restrictions on women's education, employment, mobility, and participation in public life since the regime change in 2021 [5,10,11]. These restrictions affect not only individual rights but also household welfare, service delivery, and community resilience, given women's central roles in caregiving, income generation, and social cohesion [5,22].

A further dimension of Afghanistan's current crisis involves Afghan nationals who fled the country after 2021 but were unable to secure durable refugee protection and have since been forcibly returned. Many returnees—including women activists, journalists, and former government employees—face heightened vulnerability upon return in a context of limited protection, scarce livelihoods, and widespread fear [8–12]. Their reintegration places additional strain on already fragile communities and humanitarian systems [3,4].

Together, these dynamics—economic and health system collapse, gender-based exclusion, forced return, and pervasive insecurity—represent interlinked aspects of a single, multifaceted crisis. Understanding Afghanistan's current situation therefore requires an integrated analysis that brings these dimensions together rather than addressing them as separate issues.

Purpose and scope of the report

This report was developed by the Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders Network in collaboration with the Newcomb Institute at Tulane University to offer a coherent, evidence-informed analysis of Afghanistan's current humanitarian and human rights situation, with a particular focus on women and girls. The report responds to the fragmentation that often characterizes assessments of Afghanistan by examining economic and health conditions, forced return and displacement, and the lived experiences of women and girls as interconnected elements of the same crisis.

Specifically, the report pursues two objectives:

1. To document major economic, health, and gender-related challenges in Afghanistan, drawing on available statistics and secondary data to illustrate the scale and severity of population-level vulnerability. Included in this analysis is a focus on the Afghan nationals deported from countries of refuge and forcibly returned to Afghanistan, despite risks they face there.
2. To amplify the voices of women and girls who remain inside Afghanistan, documenting the impacts of systemic restrictions on education, employment, mobility, safety, and well-being, and the implications for their present survival and future prospects.

By integrating quantitative indicators with analysis of displacement, return, and everyday lived experience, this report aims to provide policymakers, donors, and international stakeholders with a clearer understanding of how current conditions are affecting women and girls across multiple dimensions of life. The analysis is intended to inform humanitarian response, protection strategies, and longer-term efforts from donors and advocates to prevent further deterioration and support the rights and well-being of Afghanistan's most vulnerable populations, especially women and girls.

Chapter 2: Economic, Health, and Gender Equality Challenges in Afghanistan

Economic collapse and widespread poverty

Afghanistan is experiencing a severe and prolonged economic collapse that has pushed the vast majority of the population into poverty and deepened reliance on humanitarian assistance. According to assessments by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, more than 85% of Afghans now live below the poverty line, reflecting pervasive income deprivation and severely constrained household purchasing power [1,2]. Poverty is widespread across both urban and rural areas and has become increasingly persistent.



The scale of humanitarian dependence reflects the depth of economic distress. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 22.9 million people—more than half of Afghanistan’s population—require humanitarian assistance, many to meet basic food and subsistence needs [3]. For millions of households, humanitarian aid has replaced income from labor, agriculture, or small-scale enterprise as the primary means of survival.

Since 2021, Afghanistan’s economy has contracted substantially due to the freezing of international assets, withdrawal of development assistance, banking system disruptions, sanctions, and reduced private-sector activity [1,2,4]. Joint UN and World Bank assessments indicate that nearly two-thirds of Afghan households have experienced a significant drop in income, with losses particularly pronounced among households dependent on wage labor, public-sector employment, or women’s earnings [1,2].

Labor market conditions have deteriorated sharply. Unemployment has increased, job opportunities have declined, and inflation has eroded purchasing power, making basic goods increasingly unaffordable for large segments of the population [2,4]. Between 2020 and 2023, GDP per person employed declined from 13,527 to 10,784, reflecting falling productivity and constrained economic activity [4]. These trends have reduced household resilience and increased vulnerability to food insecurity, debt, and negative coping strategies.

Gendered impacts on employment and livelihoods. Economic collapse has had disproportionate impacts on women, driven both by macroeconomic contraction and by restrictions on women’s participation in the labor market [2,5]. While aggregate labor force participation rates for women remained relatively stable in 2022–2023, these figures mask a sharp deterioration in employment quality and access [4]. Available data indicate a substantial increase in the number of women actively seeking work but are unable to find employment, alongside a marked reduction in women’s actual employment [4].

Female employment among women aged 15–65 declined sharply between 2022 and 2023, reflecting the combined effects of economic contraction and exclusion from formal and informal workplaces [4]. Young women have been particularly affected. In 2024, an estimated 77.6% of women aged 18–29 were not in education, employment, or training, compared with 20.2% of men in the same age group [4]. This disparity highlights extreme gender inequality at the start of working life and signals long-term losses in national human capital.

Women's exclusion from leadership and decision-making roles has also intensified. In 2020, women held 5.9% of managerial positions; since 2021, this share has declined to near zero following the removal of women from formal governance, management, and professional roles [2,4]. The loss of women's economic participation has far-reaching consequences for household income, service delivery, and national recovery.

Basic Needs and the Humanitarian Crisis



Afghanistan is facing a severe humanitarian crisis marked by widespread deprivation of food, water, sanitation, shelter, and livelihood. According to OCHA, 22.9 million people—more than half of the population—require humanitarian assistance, underscoring the scale of unmet basic needs [3]. Severe income poverty underpins this crisis; UNDP estimates that approximately 85% of Afghans live on less than \$1 USD per day, severely constraining household purchasing power [1].

Following the 2021 political transition, the abrupt suspension of foreign aid, freezing of assets, financial system disruptions, and reduced private-sector activity precipitated a sharp economic contraction [1,2,4]. UN and World Bank assessments indicate that four out of five households experienced a decline or complete loss of their primary source of income, particularly those previously dependent on public-sector wages, women's employment, or aid-linked livelihoods [1,2].

Although modest GDP growth has been reported since 2024, population growth, unemployment, inflation, and restrictions on women's work continue to prevent recovery from translating into improved household welfare [4]. Humanitarian dependence has therefore increased rather than declined.

Food insecurity remains one of the most severe manifestations of the crisis. The World Food Programme reports that 12.4 million people—approximately 28% of the population—experience acute food insecurity, including millions facing emergency levels of hunger [6]. High food prices, unemployment, and poverty leave many households unable to afford adequate or nutritious diets, increasing risks of undernutrition, particularly among women and children.

Households increasingly resort to harmful coping strategies, including child labor and early marriage, as families attempt to reduce economic burden or secure survival, with long-term consequences for education, health, and protection outcomes [1,3].

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation further compounds the crisis. Nationally, only about 42% of the population has access to safe drinking water, with access significantly lower in rural areas [7]. It is not uncommon for children to be sent out to get water for the household. Many households rely on contaminated sources, increasing exposure to waterborne disease. Poor sanitation remains widespread, particularly in rural communities, where open defecation is common. Inadequate waste management and water pollution contribute to recurrent outbreaks of preventable illness, especially among young children [7].



Vulnerability of Afghans Re-entering After Deportation

Afghanistan is confronting a rapidly escalating emergency driven by mass forced deportation of Afghan nationals from other countries, particularly neighboring Iran and Pakistan where resettlements were largest. Large-scale returns since 2024 have significantly worsened existing vulnerabilities and overwhelmed already fragile communities.

According to IOM and UNHCR, more than 3 million Afghans were forcibly returned between 2024 and 2025, including over 2.7 million during the first eight months of 2025 alone [8,9]. Many returnees had fled Afghanistan to escape persecution, conflict, or economic collapse and now face hunger, unemployment, insecurity, and arrest upon return.

Those deported include former government employees, women activists, journalists, and civil society members—groups at heightened risk under current authorities [10–12]. Reports indicate that returnees are subject to investigation by intelligence authorities, raising serious concerns regarding surveillance, detention, and retaliation [10–12].

Economic reintegration opportunities are extremely limited. Public-sector employment is largely restricted to Taliban members, while private-sector opportunities are scarce [4]. Many returnees fall immediately into extreme poverty, increasing reliance on child labor, early marriage, and other negative coping strategies.

Education disruption is widespread. Children previously enrolled in schools in Iran or Pakistan have been abruptly removed, and Afghan girls face near-total exclusion from education upon return [9,13]. Humanitarian assistance at borders is limited to small, one-time cash grants, insufficient for sustained survival [8,9]. The mass return has intensified pressure on host communities, increasing poverty, social tension, and instability [4].

Maternal, newborn, and child health and Women's mental health

Health outcomes in Afghanistan remain among the worst globally, reflecting prolonged conflict, poverty, food insecurity, and a severely weakened health system. Women and children are disproportionately affected by limited access to care, undernutrition, preventable disease, and worsening mental health. Access to essential health services is severely constrained, particularly in rural areas. Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health estimates that approximately 72% of the population—nearly 20 million people—lack access to essential healthcare services, with women facing the greatest barriers [14].



The health system is underfunded and heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance. Funding shortages have led to widespread facility closures. The World Health Organization reported that more than 200 WHO-supported health facilities closed between March and April 2025, disrupting care for an estimated 1.84 million people [15]. Restrictions on women's mobility and shortages of female health workers further limit access to care for women and girls.

Maternal and child mortality remain alarmingly high. WHO estimates indicate that approximately 24 mothers and 167 infants die each day from largely preventable causes [16]. The maternal mortality ratio was estimated at 523 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to an average of 197 deaths per 100,000 live births globally, and the under-five mortality rate at approximately 57 per 1,000 live births, compared to an average of 37 per 1,000 live births globally [16,17].

Malnutrition is a major driver of mortality. Approximately one in three children is stunted (i.e., has low height-for-age, indicating chronic, long-term undernutrition), and between June 2024 and May 2025 an estimated 3.5 million children aged 6–59 months suffered acute malnutrition, including 867,300 cases of severe acute malnutrition [6,18]. UNICEF reports that half of young children experience severe food poverty, with up to 90% living in food poverty more broadly [19].

Mental health needs are rising due to conflict, poverty, displacement, forced return, and restrictive social conditions. Yet, services remain extremely limited, with few specialized providers and significant barriers to access, particularly for women and girls [16].

Education and Livelihood Training Opportunities for Women and Girls

Education for women and girls has undergone a profound reversal since 2021. Afghanistan is now the only country in the world where girls are officially banned from secondary and higher education [20]. UNESCO estimates that 1.4 million girls were denied access to secondary education immediately after the August 2021 ban, and by 2025 2.2 million girls were out of school, including those excluded by poverty and insecurity [20,21]. Access to higher education has been almost entirely eliminated for

women; since late 2022, universities and vocational institutes have been closed to female students, excluding more than 100,000 women immediately and over 400,000 cumulatively [21,22].

Education quality has deteriorated even where schools remain open. Shortages of trained teachers, learning materials, and safe infrastructure undermine learning outcomes, particularly in rural areas [23]. Adult literacy remains extremely low, with female literacy at 27% compared with 52% for men [23]. Even for boys, opportunities are increasingly being restricted to madrassas (religious schools), which can focus more on indoctrination of socio-political views rather than education fundamentals. Opportunities for lifelong learning and livelihood training are largely absent, further limiting women's economic participation.



Gender Equality, Rights, and the Erosion of Legal and Civic Space

Since 2021, legal protections for women have been dismantled, and Afghanistan now operates without a constitution or independent judicial framework [10–12]. Women are excluded from governance, the judiciary, and public decision-making. According to UN reporting, women hold zero positions in national or local decision-making bodies [24].

Women's freedom of movement, employment, and access to public space is severely restricted, enforced through decrees and arbitrary practices [10,11]. "Kabul Now" reports that 79% of women have no access to formal legal mechanisms, leaving survivors of violence without protection or recourse [25].

Gender-based violence, forced marriage, and early marriage remain widespread and are exacerbated by poverty and legal exclusion [10–12]. State sanctioned violence against women, such as flogging, has also been documented. Development Aid estimates that Afghan women are able to access only 17% of their full potential, compared with a global average of 60.7%, reflecting extreme gender exclusion [26].



Climate, Environment, and Sustainability

Afghanistan is among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries due to its arid geography, fragile ecosystems, and reliance on climate-sensitive agriculture [27]. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, floods, and earthquakes have intensified humanitarian needs and undermined livelihoods.

Flash floods in 2024–2025 destroyed homes, farmland, and infrastructure, causing loss of life and displacement

[28,29]. Major earthquakes in 2022, 2023, and 2025 further damaged already fragile systems [30,31]. Water scarcity, environmental degradation, and weak institutional capacity limit adaptation and resilience [27,32].



Chapter 3. Voices of Afghan Women and Girls

To better understand the depth of the crisis in Afghanistan, the Afghan Women Parliamentarian & Leaders Network (AWPLN) engaged its trusted local sources to conduct interviews with a diverse group of women and girls across affected regions of Afghanistan. These conversations were not data collection but rather case studies to bear witness to and share the experiences of women and girls in the country. The stories they share reflect raw, unfiltered realities. To ensure the safety and security of interviewees, their real names have not been used. We only include initials. We also removed any major identifiable features of their story, such as school names or specific occupations. These stories reflect more educated women and girls, a more privileged segment of the population.



Interview with Miss. S-, 11th grade student from Takhar province.

"I'm from Takhar province. I was in 11th grade at XXX Girls School in Takhar province when the Taliban took power. Alongside my regular studies at school, I was attending a private Kankor preparation course with nearly a hundred other girls. I was on the verge of graduation, filled with hope and determination to enter medical school, since becoming a doctor and serving my community had always been my dream.

But when the Taliban took control, my dream, along with so many others, was shattered. With the closure of school, I fell into a deep depression. Life suddenly changed into hopelessness, stripped of purpose and a future.

What's even more painful is the silence of the international community, the United Nations, and the countries that once stood beside Afghanistan in the fight for democracy now seems absent. Those who were once at rallies appear to have turned away, forgetting the girls who continue to suffer in silence. We urgently call on the global community to take action, to seek real solutions to this crisis, and to hold the Taliban accountable. Our rights as girls must no longer be ignored or denied."

Interview with Mrs. M- from Faizabad, Badakhshan province.

"I'm from Faizabad, the centre of Badakhshan province. I graduated from Badakhshan University with a degree in Law and Political Science, specializing in XXX. I'm married, but I lost my husband, who was serving as a police officer in Badakhshan province. He was martyred during a battle with the Taliban in Warduj district before the fall of the Republic government.

I worked in the XXX Department at the Badakhshan governor's office as an XXX Officer, which provided me with an income to support my family and my children. Unfortunately, after the Taliban took power, I lost my job and was left without any source of livelihood. My daughters, who were studying at XXX High School—one in seventh grade and the other in eighth grade—were banned from continuing

their education when the Taliban closed girls' schools above grade six. My eldest son, who is only 17 years old, had to leave school to work as a street vendor in Faizabad to help support the family and bring food for us, since we do not have any income sources. And I, despite holding a university degree, sometimes have to wash clothes in neighbors' houses just to earn a little money to survive.

Life has become unbearably difficult and exhausting. Afghan women, in particular, are being suffocated, stripped of their rights, and pushed into lives of misery and despair. To the Taliban, it seems as though the suffering, or even the death, of Afghan women means nothing. We receive no support from humanitarian organizations. It feels as if the world has abandoned us. Our only hope lies in God to deliver us from this hardship. I ask you to carry our voice to the world, to human rights institutions, and to nations that still value humanity."

Interview with Miss. S- from Kunduz province.

"I am from Kunduz province, Afghanistan. I was a seventh-year medical student at Kabul University when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. In the early days, there was fear and anxiety about the closure of universities and harassment. We didn't attend university for a couple of weeks, but after more than three weeks, I returned to the university with a few other students. The atmosphere had completely changed, and the situation was a bit strange; the excitement and energy were gone. Some of our classmates had already left the country, but still a few of my classmates were there.

When we entered the classroom, a curtain had been installed between the female and male students, so we could not see each other. Despite the fear and uncertainty, we attended classes daily. The lessons weren't organized, because many teachers and professors no longer came to the university. This half-functioning situation continued, and we were happy that at least, under these conditions, we could still pursue our long-held dreams.

But it didn't last long. The Taliban issued a decree banning girls' education beyond sixth grade. That's where the tragedy began. And then, on December 20, 2022, the final nail was driven into the coffin of girls' education. By order of Taliban leader Mullah Hibatullah, the doors of the university were closed to girls. With the closure of universities, all our dreams were shattered. Now, four years have passed since this tragedy and we remain without a future, without hope. My classmates and I only needed one more year to graduate from medical school, but overnight, everything was destroyed.

After the university closed, some of our classmates who had the means and financial capacity left Afghanistan to continue their studies abroad. But I, along with thousands of others, stayed behind and suffered. Sadly, no international organization raised its voice for Afghan girls. Everyone remained silent, as if they were in agreement with the Taliban."

Interview with Mrs. N- from Takhar province.

"I'm from Takhar province and graduated from Takhar University. I'm married and have three daughters. During the Republic government, I worked as a Human Resources Officer in the Department of Women's Affairs in Takhar, and my husband worked with NDS (National Department

of Security). Our life was good because we both had government jobs with a stable income. After the Taliban came to power in August of 2021, everything changed tragically. Both my husband and I lost our jobs, our hopes were gone, and life became harder every day. We stayed at home for six months with no income and in fear. My husband was afraid to leave the house, and it was up to me to go out to buy food and other necessities. During this time, the Taliban searched our home twice because they were informed that my husband had worked with the NDS in the previous government. Both times they harassed me and demanded that we give them our weapons. However, both times my husband was not at home, as he often stayed at his brother's house nearby.

The situation became worse because we had no income and, on the other hand, there was the risk of my husband being arrested by the Taliban. We decided to leave Takhar and go to Kabul. My husband left the city alone on foot to escape checkpoints and met us outside where there were no Taliban checkpoints. We went to Kabul and after three months, we moved to Iran because living in Afghanistan had become impossible.

We stayed in Iran for nearly three years. I enrolled my two eldest daughters in school. My husband worked as a guard in a building and I worked in a kindergarten. Unfortunately, after three years, we were deported and returned to Afghanistan.

It has now been two months since our return. Surviving is very difficult, as we lost everything we had in the past, and now we have no income. After four years, my husband still lives in constant fear that the Taliban may come to investigate and arrest him since the GDI received an order to investigate all deportees and returnees. Despite fear of my husband's arrest, neither of us have work. The Department of Women's Affairs, where I used to work, is now under PVPV (Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice), and this department plays a key role in implementing Taliban leaders' decrees. Women are not allowed to work in government jobs, while government jobs are only for Taliban members, and the rest are not allowed—neither women nor men and educated youths. The most tragic part is that my two daughters, who were in 7th and 9th grade, are not allowed to continue their education and are denied attending school. Life in Afghanistan is a great tragedy. The Taliban shows no mercy, and they are against human rights and human beings.

Sadly, there is no one to listen or help the oppressed people of Afghanistan. I sincerely request the Afghan Women's Network and leaders to be the voice of Afghan women and to share the stories of suffering women in Afghanistan with the international community and human rights defenders."

Interview with Mrs. S- from Takhar province.

"I am originally from Takhar province but am living in Kabul. I graduated from Takhar University, Faculty of Sharia, in 2015. After graduation, I worked with the GIZ (German) office in Takhar as a Legal Trainer for two and a half years. In this role, I provided legal advice to women, handled their cases, and advocated for their rights according to our work plan. Alongside this, I also taught a legal clinic at a private university.

When Takhar province was taken over by the Taliban, the GIZ office closed and I lost my job, and with the collapse of the Republic government my professional and personal dreams also ended. Some of my colleagues were relocated to Germany through GIZ, but due to my husband's illness and family challenges, I was unable to leave Afghanistan. Like me, thousands of Afghan women and girls became unemployed and saw their futures disappear. Between 2021 and 2022, my husband suffered from a severe illness that eventually led to the amputation of one of his legs. As a result, the responsibility of providing for my family fell entirely on me. At the same time, my daughters, who were studying in grades seven to ten, were deprived of continuing their education due to the closure of classes above grade six.

These past years have been some of the darkest days of our lives, leaving us with deep psychological struggles. My only source of hope has been my brother in Turkey, who occasionally sends us money, allowing us to survive at a subsistence level. Sadly, opportunities for women and men alike have almost entirely vanished in Afghanistan. Widows who must provide for their families are forbidden to work or even leave their homes. Millions deprived of education are suffering from psychological distress, with no one to listen to their voices or address their concerns.

I asked Mrs. Shabanam about the advocacy efforts taking place abroad. She explained that after more than four years of efforts, no progress was made; instead, restrictions only grew worse. She said while I remain deeply grateful to the Afghan Women Parliamentarians and Leaders Network for their continued advocacy, I humbly urge them to strengthen their efforts. If possible, I ask them to help create job opportunities for Afghan women and girls through organizations still operating in the country, and to act as a source of comfort and hope amid our suffering."

Interview with Mrs. N- from Kapisa province, Afghanistan.

"I'm originally from Kapisa province but was living in Kabul. However, due to security threats and fear of the Taliban, I was forced to migrate to Pakistan.

I hold a bachelor's degree in Sharia Law from Kabul University and worked as a Defense Lawyer for seven years in Kabul. In this role, I handled cases related to violence against women, criminal cases, and also provided legal counselling to women. When the Taliban took over Kabul, I lost my job and, in addition, became a target of the Taliban as a defense lawyer. The Taliban openly declared that defending women's rights was an act of disbelief. A week after their takeover, they came to my home to interrogate me and later issued repeated summons, demanding I appear at the district office. Therefore, due to fear of arrest, I went into hiding for six months before I finally managed to leave Afghanistan to Pakistan.

The collapse of the Republic government deprived millions of women like me of our livelihoods and dreams, leaving us hopeless. I'm the sole breadwinner for my family, responsible for my 18-year-old son. Yet here in Pakistan, I face endless struggles. As Afghan migrants, we are denied the right to work and live under the constant threat of forced deportation. The most painful part is the humiliating

treatment by police. To avoid deportation, I'm compelled to move from place to place, and I'm unable to return to Afghanistan where my life is at risk.

When I asked about women's access to justice under the Taliban, the response was bleak: women no longer have access to formal courts, the law on the elimination of violence against women has been repealed, and the cases are resolved through jirgas (a council of decision-makers), often in the absence of the affected women themselves. Women have no right to defend themselves or to participate in these decisions. Most of the defense lawyers have either fled the country or remain unemployed at home, hopeless.

Today in Afghanistan, all doors are closed to women, the education system has collapsed, and even young boys, once eager to study, have lost interest due to Taliban interference in the curriculum. They are forced to wear turbans or scarves, turning schools into places that reflect Taliban ideology rather than learning. Educated women form the foundation of a literate society as they pass knowledge to their children, and by banning women and girls from education, the Taliban seeks to deliberately create an illiterate society that serves their narrow agenda.

I call on the global community, human rights defenders, the United Nations, and the Afghan Women Parliamentarian Network to continue their advocacy and find solutions to rescue the Afghan people from this catastrophe, since the Taliban has turned life bitter and hopeless for Afghans. I also urge particular attention to the plight of Afghan migrant women in Pakistan who are suffering from unemployment, fear of eviction, and lack of access to UN offices or support systems.

We need both immediate and long-term support. On one hand, short-term job opportunities should be created for Afghan migrant women and men in Pakistan. On the other hand, proper channels of communication and support must be established between migrants and UN agencies. Programs such as language courses, online schools for Afghan children (who are excluded from Pakistani schools), tailoring courses, and beauty skill training could at least ease the psychological burden faced by migrants and give them hope for survival."

Chapter 4. Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This report demonstrates that Afghanistan is facing a multidimensional humanitarian and human rights crisis that extends well beyond short-term emergency needs. Economic collapse, food insecurity, health system breakdown, environmental shocks, and mass forced deportations are occurring alongside the systematic exclusion of women and girls from education, employment, justice, and public life. These dynamics are not isolated; they reinforce one another and collectively undermine household survival, community resilience, and prospects for future recovery.

The findings show that Afghanistan's crisis is not only a development setback but a profound human dignity crisis, with women and girls bearing the heaviest burden. The removal of women from public life has weakened service delivery, reduced household income, and eroded social cohesion, while the forced return of millions of Afghans has placed additional pressure on already fragile communities and humanitarian systems. Climate-related disasters and environmental degradation further compound vulnerability, particularly for rural and displaced populations.

The testimonies of Afghan women and girls presented in Chapter 3 give voice to these realities. They illustrate not only deep suffering but also resilience, agency, and a continued demand for rights, safety, and opportunity. Their experiences make clear that Afghanistan's crisis cannot be addressed through fragmented or sector-specific responses. What is required is an integrated approach that centers protection, humanitarian assistance, and pathways to dignity—particularly for women, girls, and forcibly returned populations.

Afghanistan's current political isolation and governance constraints make conventional development frameworks largely unattainable in the short term. However, this must not lead to disengagement. On the contrary, sustained humanitarian action, protection-focused engagement, and investment in resilience are essential to prevent further deterioration and to preserve the foundations for any future recovery.

Recommendations for Donor Countries and International Partners

1. Scale Up and Sustain Humanitarian Assistance

- Provide flexible, multi-year funding for food assistance, nutrition programs, maternal and child health services, WASH, shelter, and basic livelihoods.
- Prioritize women-headed households, children, deportees, people with disabilities, and marginalized communities in targeting and delivery.
- Ensure humanitarian aid is predictable and sufficient to reduce reliance on harmful coping strategies such as child labor and early marriage.

2. Protect and Support Women and Girls

- Maintain sustained diplomatic pressure to uphold women's and girls' rights, including access to education, work, healthcare, and freedom of movement.
- Invest in alternative and community-based education models, remote learning, and skills training that can operate under current restrictions.
- Expand safe spaces, psychosocial support, and livelihood opportunities for women and girls to reduce isolation and economic dependency.

3. Address the Forced Return and Deportation Crisis as a Priority

- Establish dedicated emergency and reintegration programs for returnees, including shelter, cash assistance, food, healthcare, education access, and livelihood support.
- Advocate strongly against forced deportations from neighboring countries and for protection mechanisms for Afghans at risk of persecution.
- Ensure coordination between humanitarian actors to avoid gaps in post-return support and protection.

4. Strengthen Local Resilience and Livelihoods

- Support community-based livelihood programs, including small-scale agriculture, livestock, micro-enterprises, and home-based income generation.
- Fund climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives that target flood-, drought-, and earthquake-prone areas, with special attention to women and returnees.
- Expand vocational and skills training that can be delivered locally and safely, including for youth and women.

5. Ensure Protection, Accountability, and Human Rights Monitoring

- Support independent monitoring mechanisms to document human rights violations, particularly against women, girls, activists, and deportees.
- Use diplomatic and multilateral channels to promote accountability and safeguard civilian protection, even in the absence of formal governance structures.

6. Maintain Pathways for Future Recovery

- Continue technical assistance, knowledge-sharing, and engagement with Afghan professionals and civil society, including those in exile.
- Keep scholarships, relocation pathways, and safe migration routes open for at-risk populations, especially women leaders, journalists, and human rights defenders.
- Preserve Afghanistan's human capital to prevent irreversible losses and enable long-term recovery when conditions allow.

Chapter 5. Final Note from the Afghan Women Parliamentarian and Leaders Network

Afghanistan stands at a critical crossroads. The international community can choose disengagement—allowing suffering, instability, and rights violations to deepen—or take a principled stand by supporting the Afghan people, particularly women, girls, minorities, and deportees, in their struggle for survival and dignity.

Even under current restrictions, flexible humanitarian aid, innovative education and livelihood models, protection mechanisms, and sustained advocacy can save lives and preserve hope. Supporting Afghanistan today is not only a moral obligation; it is an investment in regional stability, global human rights commitments, and the future of a population that has endured decades of conflict and exclusion.

The Afghan Women Parliamentarians & Leaders Network urges donor countries, humanitarian actors, UN agencies, and international partners not to abandon Afghanistan. The voices documented in this report demand action—now and for the long term.

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