

FORUM:	Human Rights Council
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Introduction

In 2025, the situation of women's rights in Afghanistan remains to be one of the most pressing humanitarian concerns worldwide. Afghan women and girls are continuously oppressed and face extremely restrictive policies ever since the Taliban's takeover in August of 2021. These regressive policies have managed to roll back decades of progress that the Afghan women were able to obtain. Currently, women are barred from attending secondary school, working, going to a park, showing their faces in public, speaking in public, and many more (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Background

Afghanistan has experienced decades of political instability, conflict, and international intervention, all shaping its human rights culture and policies. Women's rights, in particular, have changed drastically depending on the governing body at the time. The Taliban, an Afghan militant movement, first came into the picture in 1996, where they remained until 2001. During their first ruling regime, women were practically erased everywhere, removed from education, banned from working in certain sectors, and forced into seclusion. The United States subsequently led an intervention in late 2001, causing the Taliban to be removed from power and a new government body ushered in. Between 2001 and 2021, conditions for women in Afghanistan significantly increased, with women and girls regaining access to schools, universities, and workplaces, with significant increases in female literacy rates, political participation, and public presence (UNESCO, 2019).

However, in August of 2021, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan almost immediately after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, causing a drastic reversal on all the progress the Afghan women had made in the two decades where they weren't present. Currently, by 2025, Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls and women are systematically barred from both secondary and higher education (UNESCO, 2025). The United Nations and human rights organizations have described these policies as a form of "gender apartheid."





Figure 1 (Left): Afghan women wait to receive food distributed by a humanitarian aid group in Kabul, Afghanistan, May 23, 2023. Taliban leaders in Afghanistan have ordered fresh limitations on women, including mandating them to keep their faces and bodies covered

Figure 2 (Right): Two Afghan medicine students (Left & Center) listening to their Professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Kabul, as they examine a plaster showing a part of a human body - January 1962 (Getty Images)

Problems Raised

Restriction on Afghan Women's Education

Under Afghanistan's current regime enforced by the Taliban ever since their takeover in 2021, women are facing increasingly severe limitations on their education. In fact, Afghanistan remains the only country in the world where women and girls are banned from secondary and higher education (UNESCO, 2025). As of March 2025, more than two million girls are out of school, as the Taliban has banned women from attending most formal educational institutions (UNICEF, 2025). Additionally, UNICEF projects that if this were to continue, around 4 million girls will be out of school (UNICEF, 2025). This severely impedes or even halts Afghan women's academic or long-term career opportunities, not to mention stripping them of their rights. Education equips individuals with critical thinking skills, professional competencies, and the ability to participate in civic life, and without it, this entire generation of Afghan women will face systemic economic dependence and disenfranchisement.

Limits Placed on Employment Opportunities

Adding on to the deprivation of education that women face under the Taliban, there is currently a near-total exclusion of Afghan women from employment opportunities. According to UN Women's 2025 report, 78% of young Afghan women are excluded from education, employment, or any form of vocational training, which is nearly four times higher than that of young men (UN Women, 2025). This exclusion is by no means unintended or accidental, rather is a direct byproduct of the restrictive regimes that deliberately restrict women's participation in all sectors of work.

This causes extreme consequences. Women are continuously locked out of the labor market, unable to acquire new skills, and are ultimately dependent on men, whether it be their family members or



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someone else, for financial support. This leads to a cycle of poverty and an inability to be self-sufficient, perpetuating as well the already substantial power imbalance these women face. In fact, this exclusion deepens the marginalization already faced by Afghan women, and causes them to be especially vulnerable to exploitation, forced marriage, and domestic abuse.

Restrictions on Afghan Women's Expression

The Taliban's "Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" policies cause Afghan women to currently not be able to dress or behave in ways that the rest of the world deems as a baseline privilege to have. This includes limitations on not only their appearance, but also their bodily autonomy as well. Women must adhere to strict dress codes covering the full body and face, cannot travel long distances without a male guardian, and are banned from numerous public venues, including parks, gyms, and most workplaces. As a result, Afghan women are slowly being erased from being seen in public altogether, which is not only dehumanizing for the women involved but downright chilling to the rest of the world.

All in all, these restrictions are an effort to prevent women from engaging in social, cultural, and political life, erase female perspectives from public discourse, and reinforce deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Even women that previously held leadership roles in business, the government, or society are now largely unheard from, with many being forced into domestic confinement. This repression extends to media and activism efforts, with journalists and activists facing constant death threats, which make it nearly impossible to publicly speak out about these laws.

Reduced Access to Healthcare Services

The Taliban placed a ban on women entering healthcare or midwife training in December 2024, which caused a devastating effect on healthcare access for women. This is mainly due to the fact that Afghan women aren't allowed to go to a male doctor for examination, and since women have been deprived of the right to treat other women, their healthcare options are slim to none. In some areas, women and girls often must travel long distances to find a facility with female staff; that is, if they can find one at all. In the case that they don't, they often just forgo treatment altogether. This shortage of female professionals in the medical field has caused increases in maternal mortality rates, limitations in access to prenatal and postnatal care, and restricts the availability of mental health services for women (AP News, 2025).

Psychological Effects on Afghan Women

The combined effect of all the problems mentioned above and more have had profound psychological consequences on the women and girls who must deal with it every day of their current



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lives. While there aren't exact precise statistics due to the lack of data provided, there has been an estimated spike in cases of depression, anxiety, and trauma among Afghan women (AP News, 2023). The sense of hopelessness in particular is especially prevalent in younger women, especially since they were around before 2021, before there had been such restrictive measures placed on them.

Additionally, the banning of many social groups for women and girls, including schools, libraries, public gatherings, and women's organizations alike has managed to deepen isolation among Afghan women. Without opportunities to connect or socialize with others, many women report feelings of being erased from society.

International Actions

United Nations Security Council Resolutions

Following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, there were many subsequent adoptions of resolutions in the UN Security Council, which all attempted to condemn restrictions on women's rights and urged the Taliban to uphold international obligations under instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Particularly, the Resolution 2593 (August 2021) demanded safe passage for Afghans seeking to leave and emphasized human rights, including those of women and girls.

UNAMA Mandate Renewal

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan renewed and expanded its mandate, now with a specific focus on humanitarian issues, particularly the rights of Afghan women and girls. The mandate now documents new restrictions towards women, subsequently reporting the restrictions to the Security Council under the 2025 mandate extension.

International Sanctions

The U.S., EU, UK, Canada, and other partners have maintained targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders linked to human rights abuses. Concurrently, funding is being provided for the protection of women's rights by major aid donors, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. While most humanitarian aid continues through UN agencies and NGOs to avoid punishing civilians, development assistance remains largely frozen pending reforms.

OIC Diplomatic Engagement

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has held special sessions with the Taliban, attempting to convince them to reverse the restrictions on women. A main focal point of these meetings is



pointing out how the bans are inconsistent with Islamic principles on education and work. In 2024, OIC envoys and envoys from Qatar, Turkey, and Indonesia engaged in direct talks with Taliban officials, though with limited tangible outcomes so far.

Key Players

Afghanistan

Being the country where this crisis is taking place, Afghanistan is the focal point of this issue. Since August 2021, women's rights are some of the lowest on a global scale, not to mention the aforementioned bans on freedom of expression and education. While a large portion of the Afghan population (primarily women, civil activists, and urban residents) is strongly against these restrictions, they are unable to speak out about it as their ability to voice dissent is highly repressed. Rural areas, on the other hand, live under strict cultural norms that align with the Taliban regime, though many also resent the regime for the loss of international aid they have suffered.

The Taliban

The Taliban, being the de facto governing party since 2021, they are the primary driver of the oppression on women and girls in general. The group rejects foreign criticism, framing it as interference, and claiming their own policies are in line with Sharia law and Afghan cultural traditions. The group claims that women's rights are protected due "within Islamic principles". However, to justify their own actions, they define those principles in ways that exclude girls from secondary and higher education, restrict women from working in most professions, and limit their public presence. As of 2025, there has been no sign that the Taliban has been willing to take back the policies, though some officials have indicated that they are open to cordial international discussions. It's also important to add that they have only been diplomatically recognized by one member nation- Russia (AP News, 2025).

Possible Solutions

Targeted Sanctions Placed on Rights Violators

International bodies could place or expand targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders and/or officials responsible for the gender discriminatory laws. These measures could include travel bans, freezing assets, or restrictions on international trade or transactions. These sanctions should put pressure on the policymakers without harming or straining the general Afghan population.



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Tie International Aid to Measurable Improvements in Women's Rights

Donor countries or NGOs could make the reversal of certain policies on women's rights a precondition for their continued provision of international aid. This could involve setting clear terms and conditions, such as reopening secondary schools for girls or allowing women to take part in the medical field. The catch would be tying the international aid provided to the amount of verifiable progress the government has made to reverse the regime they have currently.

Support Alternative Education or Skills Training Opportunities

While the bans on education are still in place, NGOs or member states could expand and fund safe, discreet learning systems for girls or women. These could include online classes on encrypted platforms, home-based study groups, or partnerships with regional universities to offer remote courses or scholarships abroad.

Mental Health and Support Groups

Member states and NGOs could provide safe platforms or online groups for Afghan women facing isolation or other social withdrawals. This could include online counselling, access to peer support groups, and resource hubs on legal rights, healthcare, and education opportunities. Although not directly mitigating the policies, these efforts can drastically improve the wellbeing of Afghan women during the time while the policies are potentially being reconsidered.

Glossary

Civil Liberties

Freedoms that protect individuals from government overreach, including freedom of speech, religion, and assembly.

Cultural Norms

The shared expectations and rules guiding the behavior of people within social groups, often unwritten.

Discrimination

The act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually, often based on race, sex, religion, or other characteristics.

Freedom of Movement

The legal right of individuals to travel from place to place within a country or to leave and return.



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Gender-Based Violence

Harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including physical, sexual, or psychological abuse.

Gender Equality

The state in which individuals of all genders have equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights.

Human Rights

Rights regarded as belonging fundamentally to all persons, such as the rights to life, liberty, and dignity.

International Humanitarian Law

A set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict, protecting those not taking part in hostilities.

Legal Safeguards

Protections built into the law to defend rights and ensure fair treatment.

Marginalization

The process of relegating a group or class to a powerless or unimportant position within a society.

Oppression

Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power, often systematic and institutional.

Patriarchy

Social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly, control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.

Persecution

The act or practice of harassing or punishing in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict, especially because of differing beliefs or identity.

Protective Legislation

Laws enacted to safeguard the rights and welfare of a particular group.

Sanctions

Measures taken by a country or group of countries to penalize another country, often to influence its behavior.

Sharia Law

The religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, covering both public and private aspects of life.



Taliban

An Islamic fundamentalist movement that governed Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and regained control in 2021, enforcing strict interpretations of Islamic law.

Violence Against Women

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women.

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