

# ARTICLE 11

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:
  - a. The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;
  - b. The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;
  - c. The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
  - d. The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;
  - e. The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;
  - f. The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.
2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:
  - a. To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;
  - b. To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
  - c. To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities;
  - d. To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.
  - e. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.



“We have to fight back. I’m not covering my face and I have no intention of doing so... We’ll try to fight this even though we are tired, we’re exhausted. I’ve worked outside my home for 16 years... But [the Taliban] are treating us as though we don’t know anything.”

—Afghan woman teacher<sup>1</sup>

“The Taliban have made life for Afghan women and girls intolerable. They have erased them from all spheres of life and systematically stripped away their rights and dignity.”

—Amnesty International<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Article 11 of CEDAW addresses the elimination of gender-based discrimination in the sphere of employment and occupation. It obliges States Parties to guarantee women’s equal rights in employment, encompassing the right to work, equal access to employment opportunities, and the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value. The Article specifically prohibits discriminatory practices based on marital or maternal status, including dismissal due to pregnancy or maternity leave. It further requires the provision of paid maternity leave or equivalent social benefits, ensuring such leave does not result in the loss of employment, seniority, or associated social entitlements. Article 11 also mandates the use of fair and objective selection criteria in employment and seeks to address systemic disparities such as the gender pay gap. Additionally, it calls for the regular review and revision of protective legislation related to women’s employment, to ensure alignment with contemporary scientific and technological developments.<sup>3</sup>

During the Republic Period (2004-2021), Afghan women were actively engaged in nearly all aspects of the development of Afghanistan. Women in Afghanistan navigated a highly constrained and complex economic environment characterized by persistent gender disparities. Although advancements were made in women’s labor force participation, structural barriers and socio-cultural norms continued to limit their economic engagement. Despite constitutional provisions

affirming gender equality, many women continued to face systemic discrimination and restricted access to employment opportunities, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles.<sup>4</sup>

During the Republic Period, Afghan women held positions as ministers, deputy provincial governors, deputy ministers, and parliamentarians. By 2020, women comprised 27 percent of parliament, 21 percent of the defense counsel, and held 6.5 percent of ministerial-level positions.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, there were 265 female judges out of a total of 1,951 in the judiciary. In 2020, 5,489 women were serving in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, representing 2 percent of the total of those forces.<sup>6</sup>

Before the Taliban’s takeover in 2021, women constituted approximately 21 percent of Afghanistan’s civil service workforce, with around 16 percent occupying senior management roles. Although national targets aimed to increase female representation in the civil service to 30 percent by 2020, actual figures remained between 21 percent and 28 percent.<sup>7</sup> Women made up 35 percent of public-school educators, 27 percent of government personnel, and 10 percent of lawyers.<sup>8</sup>

Due to patriarchal cultural restrictions on girls’ and women’s movement and employment outside the home, Afghan girls and women had low rates of employment outside the home compared to men. Female involvement in the labor market was 15 percent in 2001 and rose to 22 percent in 2019. Women were poorly represented in senior and middle management roles. In 2020, women accounted for only 5.9 percent of individuals in

these positions, underscoring their marginalization in organizational leadership.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, women’s entrepreneurial activity demonstrated a degree of resilience. By 2020, more than 2,400 formal women-owned enterprises were registered across 32 provinces, alongside approximately 56,000 informal women-run businesses. Collectively, these ventures were estimated to have generated over 130,000 jobs, illustrating the potential economic contributions of Afghan women despite pervasive structural constraints.<sup>10</sup>

## Sex Discrimination and Employment

Following the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, Afghan girls and women have faced systematic violations of their right to employment. Taliban edicts, bans, directives, laws, policies, and practices have eliminated many girls and women from the formal and informal workforce, and more broadly forced them out of public and civic life. The advancements women made in gender inclusion in employment were largely dismantled following the Taliban’s return to power, resulting in severe restrictions on women’s engagement in public and governmental affairs. Under the current regime, women are entirely excluded from official governance structures. These actions are compounded by other Taliban laws, such as mahram<sup>11</sup> requirements and restrictive orders on hijab and burkas. The ramifications of these actions include girls’ and women’s economic hardship and destitution, and the deterioration of their physical and mental health.<sup>12</sup>

The systematic exclusion of girls and women from employment is widespread and mandated by the highest levels of Taliban leadership. A 2022 book by the Taliban’s Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, with a foreword by their Supreme Leader, argues that under Sharia Law, “women should stay at home as their homes are their ‘cover’ (*al-satr*)... they should stay with their children and parent them... women are weak and their intellect and religion are deficient (*naqes al-aql wa al-din*).”<sup>13</sup> Haqqani argues in detail using discriminatory language that women “cannot become leaders,” at the local, communal, national, or international level.<sup>14</sup>

These restrictive measures are enforced by the Taliban’s Ministry of Vice and Virtue, whose officers are well-known for their discrimination against and

abuse of girls and women. Women working in the public and private sectors have been subjected to random visits by Taliban officials who monitor their behavior and adherence to the Taliban’s dress codes.<sup>15</sup> On 7th May 2022, the Taliban ordered older girls and women to cover their faces in public, announcing that failure to comply would result in potential imprisonment or dismissal from state jobs for their fathers or closest male relative.<sup>16</sup> In Herat, Taliban officials ordered neighborhood men to prepare lists of women who worked for “big organizations, government offices, and were reporters, civil society activists, and those who spoke against the Taliban in the media or criticized the Taliban.”<sup>17</sup> Those targeted included high-ranking women members of the former provincial government.<sup>18</sup>

On August 24, 2021, a Taliban spokesman announced that women should not show up to work until unspecified systems were implemented to “ensure their safety.”<sup>19</sup> On September 11, 2021, female employees of the Ministry of Finance were instructed to stay home until “a proper work environment is provided.”<sup>20</sup> Since then, girls and women across Afghanistan have been systematically prevented from coming to work in both the formal and informal sectors. Some girls and women have attempted to continue working despite intimidation and physical danger. Others have been forced to stay home due to Taliban enforcers physically barring them from traveling to or entering their workplaces.<sup>21</sup>

According to more than 70 percent of women-headed households surveyed, social and cultural restrictions are the main barrier to women’s employment. Taliban’s bans on women’s freedoms since August 2021 are cited as playing an important role.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in 2023, 42 percent of women-owned businesses reported a deteriorating security environment, compared to 12 percent of men-owned businesses.<sup>23</sup>

The Taliban’s systematic removal of girls and women from the labor force and their discriminatory restrictions on employment caused disproportionate job loss among girls and women. The job loss rate for women increased by 25 percent between June 2021 and the end of 2022, whereas for men it increased by 7 percent.<sup>24</sup> Women with high-value jobs were the most negatively affected.<sup>25</sup> By 2024, according to UN Women, 24 percent of women were active economically, compared to 89 percent of men. Notably, this rise in women’s economic activity is not due to more economic opportunities for women.

Rather, the ongoing severe food insecurity and humanitarian crises Afghans are facing are pushing women to look for ways to support themselves and their families. Afghan women work mostly in lower-paying, informal, and insecure forms of employment, frequently engaging in home-based work with limited legal protections and social benefits.<sup>26</sup>

The Taliban's exclusion of girls and women is enforced in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. Most all women government employees who worked under the Republic have been ordered to stay home, except for some women employed in the health and education sectors. Private sector employers have dismissed many women, especially those in senior positions.<sup>27</sup> Women who are still working, for example, in healthcare and primary education, are often not paid, as these sectors were almost entirely funded by foreign donors, and aid has been significantly reduced or completely cut off.<sup>28</sup>

Other discriminatory practices enforced by the Taliban, including the mahram<sup>29</sup> requirement and strict dress codes, compound direct measures excluding girls and women from employment. The mahram requirement makes the employment of women near-impossible, as it requires male family members to accompany women to work and "to essentially become a second unpaid worker."<sup>30</sup> In cases where women do not have a family member available to act as a mahram, the requirement is entirely prohibitive.<sup>31</sup> Those older girls and women who work outside the home are forced to walk long distances to work, or are unable to go at all, because bus and taxi drivers have been instructed not to pick up single girls and women due to the mahram requirement.<sup>32</sup> Those who break the rule put themselves in danger. Amnesty International and UNAMA have reported that "any public appearance without a mahram exposes women to the risk of punishment," including harassment, beating, and arrest by Taliban agents.<sup>33</sup> The result is that older girls and women are forced to stay home rather than go to work.<sup>34</sup>

## Government Work

On September 7, 2021, the Taliban announced a transitional government with no women in the Cabinet.<sup>35</sup> The deputy head of the Taliban political office in Qatar stated in an interview shortly after the Taliban took power that women are forbidden in the Taliban government's top posts.<sup>36</sup> Since then, no

woman has been appointed or allowed to remain in post in any policymaking, administrative, or judicial capacity in the Taliban's government or any state institutions. Women have also been banned from attending the national *jirga*, which was attended by 3,500 so-called representatives from across Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> The Deputy Prime Minister stated that the presence of women was unnecessary, and that they were "somehow involved" because "their sons will be part of the gathering."<sup>38</sup>

In September 2021, women civil servants were directed by the Taliban to stay home, except where they could not be replaced by male colleagues in health, education, and security sectors.<sup>39</sup> The Taliban Minister of Finance directed that women employed in the Finance Ministry nominate a male family member to take their place and for the women to remain at home. Similar Taliban measures to prevent women from showing up to work occurred at the local level across the country.<sup>40</sup>

Employees of the former government, members of security and defense institutions, and people who protested against the Taliban's discrimination and violence have been targeted by the Taliban.<sup>41</sup> To illustrate, 248 former government employees who protested were reportedly arrested and detained between 15 August 2021 and 15 November 2022.<sup>42</sup> These include many women who subsequently were arrested by the Ministry of Vice and Virtue.<sup>43</sup>

## The Legal Sector

The Taliban completely removed and barred all women judges, prosecutors, and lawyers from working in the justice sector in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.<sup>44</sup> Following a mass firing of prosecutors in August 2021, the Taliban Ministry of Justice started procedures for re-licensing lawyers.<sup>45</sup> These positions are now only open to men. Women are unable to renew their legal licenses or appear in court.<sup>46</sup>

The exclusion of women from the justice sector is intertwined with the religious fundamentalist ideology of the Taliban. The Taliban fired all women and men judges and replaced them with an "all-male cadre of Taliban members educated in *madrastas*, schools offering basic religious education, rather than legal training."<sup>47</sup>

In 2023, the Taliban transformed the Attorney General's Office and renamed it the General Directorate for Monitoring and Follow-Up of Decrees and Directives.<sup>48</sup> With the erasure of the Attorney General's Office, the Taliban now operate under a system of impunity. In response to these policies and actions, a group of women who were arrested and violently beaten for protesting Taliban discrimination against women and girls. They were forced into vehicles by the Taliban and taken to undisclosed locations. They were imprisoned for multiple days and tortured as punishment for protesting.<sup>49</sup> Though the Taliban acknowledged they had committed these crimes, there was no way to hold the violators accountable as the Taliban had dismantled the entire legal sector and replaced it with their loyalists. Taliban restrictions on the lives of women and girls have forced many girls and women to stay indoors out of fear of violence, effectively erasing them from public life.<sup>50</sup>

## Journalism and Media

The Taliban has systematically purged Afghanistan's press and media, disproportionately targeting women and all those who vocally oppose their regime. Since taking power, the Taliban have repeatedly prevented women journalists from entering their offices or reporting in the field.<sup>51</sup> In August 2021, the Taliban began carrying out house-to-house searches looking for journalists and individuals with ties to the Republic and Western forces.<sup>52</sup> By 2022, an estimated 80 percent of women journalists had lost their jobs or left the profession, and hundreds of media outlets had been forced to close.<sup>53</sup> The few women permitted to continue their work in the media were ordered to wear headscarves on screen.<sup>54</sup>

In November 2021, the Taliban barred women from appearing in television dramas.<sup>55</sup> On February 28, 2024, the Taliban's spokesperson for the Ministry of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Abdul Ghaffar Farooq, announced that women appearing on television must wear a black hijab and have their faces covered, only leaving their eyes visible.<sup>56</sup> In April 2024, the Taliban in Helmand verbally instructed media outlets to refrain from airing women's voices. Also in April 2024, the Taliban instructed media outlets to ban women from co-hosting shows with male journalists and to refrain from reporting on women's rights and violence against women.<sup>57</sup>

The Taliban's actions have made media outlets "an oppressive space" for women, with some women journalists forced into exile, while others have been detained and beaten for covering protests by women activists.<sup>58</sup> With Afghan girls and women's rights being systematically suppressed by the Taliban, there are few women reporters left to tell their story. Women have also disappeared from entertainment media.<sup>59</sup>

## Primary and Secondary Teachers

Female teachers have been severely affected by Taliban restrictions. With girls' schools forced to shut, and women prohibited from teaching any males, including male primary school students, thousands of female teachers have lost their jobs and have not been offered alternative employment. This includes approximately 4,000 women who lost their jobs after teacher training units were suspended across Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup>

Those who continue teaching in girls' primary schools are subjected to intimidation and face threats and violence. In May 2023, in an extreme example, a 28-year-old female teacher was murdered and dismembered in Kunduz province, an attack widely blamed on the Taliban. The Taliban confirmed this attack but denied that the murdered woman was a teacher.<sup>61</sup> In another example, an Afghan woman high school teacher told Amnesty International that she had received death threats from the Taliban and had been summoned by a local court as she had previously taught co-educational sports. She received a letter from the Taliban stating that if they caught her, they would "cut your ears off, and this will be a lesson for others in [your] province."<sup>62</sup> She is now in hiding, and her family believes she has fled the country.<sup>63</sup> In 2022, the Taliban closed almost all the primary schools for girls (the only schools for girls allowed to operate), thus ensuring the loss of work for women teachers in those schools.<sup>64</sup>

A 28-year-old woman teacher from Samangan Province who was forced out of work by the Taliban stated:

"Everything has changed. I was an independent woman and now I stay home. Women are deprived of all their rights and freedoms...I was teaching courses, but the Taliban forbade me to teach...My income was a big help. I could spend the money on my children and use my

own money to pay for my travel costs, but now I'm dependent on my husband. He gives me spending money...It's the worst situation when a woman who works and earns her own money is suddenly forced to stay home all the time—that affects our mental health. Once again, we have become the *siyasars* ['blackhead'] of the house. In the past, we felt as strong as men. When I participated in a conference, I was proud of myself. I felt like I was someone."<sup>65</sup>

There are also reports of female teachers' salaries who are allowed to continue to work not reaching their bank accounts, while male colleagues' salaries continue to be paid.<sup>66</sup> (For more information see Article 10.)

## Healthcare Sector

Despite some ability for some women to work in a limited number of jobs in healthcare, the Taliban has created a hostile environment for these women that, at times, prohibits them from carrying out their work.<sup>67</sup> On February 1, 2023, the Taliban ordered all female staff of hospitals in Kabul to wear a black hijab and be masked at all times. On February 22, 2023, the Taliban closed four medical centers run by female doctors in Ghazni because male patients were treated by female doctors.<sup>68</sup> There are also reports of female healthcare workers' salaries not being paid for up to five months at a time.<sup>69</sup>

In December 2024, the Taliban closed all midwifery and nursing schools and programs to women and girls.<sup>70</sup> With the current ban on girls attending secondary school and university, older girls' and women's entry into the health profession is now nearly impossible.<sup>71</sup> (For more details on the healthcare sector, see Article 12.)

## Women's Employment in NGOs

Even before the official edicts limiting women's roles in NGOs came into being, the Taliban pressured NGOs to hire only men.<sup>72</sup> As the Taliban increased pressure to exclude girls and women from informal and formal work, employers saw that hiring or retaining their female employees was creating additional security and administrative risks. The Taliban's laws on gender-segregated workspaces and covering mahram travel costs also placed additional financial stress on employers, further disincentivizing them from hiring women.<sup>73</sup>

In 2022, over 400 gender-motivated incidents, including 39 of threats and intimidation and 57 restrictions on the movement of women aid workers, were linked to Taliban actors.<sup>74</sup> Many women-led NGOs had their female directors, board members, and bank signatories forced out by the Taliban.<sup>75</sup> Women who work for gender-based violence providers are at particular risk of Taliban threats of "violence and death" if they continue their work.<sup>76</sup>

On December 24, 2022, the Taliban Ministry of Economy announced an immediate, countrywide ban on women working for NGOs in Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> Exemptions existed for women working in health and education, however, those exemptions were not consistently applied.<sup>78</sup> On April 4, 2023, the Taliban expanded the ban to prohibit Afghan women from working for the United Nations. These restrictions have since been extended to prohibit women from working online from home.<sup>79</sup> Taliban measures are removing Afghan women from NGOs, humanitarian aid agencies, and the United Nations.<sup>80</sup> The result is that girls and women find it exceptionally difficult, and sometimes impossible, to directly access aid and public health services.

The Taliban searched for women who worked or continue to work for NGOs. In Ghazni city, a woman who previously worked for an NGO, who is now in hiding, said:

"I heard that they [the Taliban] entered our office. They collected our computers, saying, 'These are the women who work for the foreigners.'... The night that the Taliban attacked the center of Ghazni, I fled to [another province] early the following day. They had asked about me. The imams have told me that the Taliban have asked them to report women who have worked with foreign NGOs and those who attempt to leave the country...I was worried that our neighbors would report me to get credit from the Taliban. ... I fear my colleagues as well; they might report me just to save their own lives."<sup>81</sup>

The Taliban's ban on women working for NGOs has also had profound and negative effects on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Immediately following the ban, many INGOs partially or fully suspended activities in Afghanistan, including the United Nations, Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Care, Christian Aid and World Vision.<sup>82</sup> According to UN Women, "94 per cent of surveyed national

organizations fully or partially suspended their activities in the immediate aftermath of the ban [on women NGO workers].”<sup>83</sup> Following the ban, estimates by UN Women found that 11.6 million women and girls would be left without vital humanitarian assistance.<sup>84</sup> Widowed and single women are especially vulnerable, due to the absence of a mahram to collect aid on their behalf, and female employees of NGOs are at risk of poverty.<sup>85</sup> Although some INGOs subsequently resumed activities without any female employees, “the situation remains uncertain for many women-led national organizations and their female employees.”<sup>86</sup>

On August 15, 2024, the Taliban’s Department of Economy instructed NGOs to remove the word “woman” from their organizational names.<sup>87</sup> To mitigate the impacts of Afghan NGOs shutting down completely, some workers used their personal savings to try and save organizations from collapse. Shamim, who ran an NGO supporting women and children for more than ten years, continues her advocacy work remotely. She said: “I have so far spent from my savings—which are almost running out. But we have no other choice and have to continue—otherwise my colleagues will lose their motivation and hope.”<sup>88</sup> (See Article 13 for more details on removal of women from work with NGOs.)

## Women Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders, including women lawyers, journalists, and civil society activists, have been targeted by the Taliban. In 2021, there were at least 11 targeted killings and 12 detentions of human rights defenders, civil society activists, and journalists.<sup>89</sup> Four of these were women.<sup>90</sup> In addition to these cases, there were numerous reports between August and December 2021 of groups of women activists being harassed and beaten during protests, and of women and girl protestors being dispersed through violent methods, including pepper spray, and hitting protestors with rifle butts.<sup>91</sup> Women and girl protestors have reported being beaten and tortured with electric shocks.<sup>92</sup> The Taliban have reportedly raped girls and women in jail, including filming the gang rape of an Afghan woman activist jailed for protesting; the Taliban voices in the rape film tell her the brutality is a means to try and prevent her from continuing her work.<sup>93</sup>

## Fashion and Beauty

Following the August 2021 Taliban edict telling women to stay home, “Made in Afghanistan” fashion brands such as the Ethical Fashion Initiative have been forced to remove all webpages that link to their work in Afghanistan. To protect their Afghan workers, they have refrained from publishing any personally identifiable information linked to their employees.<sup>94</sup> Men have since returned to their workshops, but women have stayed home out of fear for their safety.<sup>95</sup>

Ms. Van Bergen of the responsible craftsperson company Nest, which worked with Afghan women craft makers, said: “With women’s rights now in question at best, and artisan businesses feeling the necessity of shutting down social media accounts and websites, the ripple effects economically and culturally are all in question. Frighteningly so.”<sup>96</sup>

All of the approximately 60,000 women and girls who were employed by 12,000 hair and beauty salons across Afghanistan have lost their jobs under the Taliban.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the professional and economic toll, the social and professional impacts of this shutdown have been profound. Shukriya, a 46-year-old beautician, worked for two years in Kabul before she was banned from employment. Her husband earned a few dollars a week as a day laborer, so her salary was critical. Her work also offered her some respite as she watched the Taliban come to power and immediately begin stripping away women’s rights. She said, “I could get away from anxiety and mental pressure by going to the salon and working.” Shukriya is now one of the 60,000 women who have lost their jobs in the beauty sector.<sup>98</sup> Heather Barr of Human Rights Watch explained, “This isn’t about getting your hair and nails done. This is about 60,000 women losing their jobs. This is about women losing one of the only places they could go for community and support.”<sup>99</sup>

## Impacts of Taliban Forcing Women Out of Work

Job losses are forcing women and their families, especially women-headed households, deep into poverty, which in turn is affecting food security. An assessment by Women for Women International in March 2022 found that 25 percent of women

surveyed who had been earning money from work reported their income had dropped to zero since the Taliban returned to power. Additionally, 92 percent of women's income continued to decrease or had remained at zero over the previous year. With women's lost wages, food insecurity has increased. Only four percent of women in the survey reported "always having enough to eat."<sup>100</sup> 33 percent of women reported they had enough to eat, but it was not the nutritious food they wanted to eat. Overwhelmingly, Afghan women reported they were concerned about a lack of nutritious food for their children.<sup>101</sup>

Research by the Afghanistan Analysts Network found that Afghan girls and women are experiencing the Taliban's restrictions on employment as "the appropriation of their independence and dignity, the crushing of their sense of self-worth and the shuttering of future options for themselves, their sisters or daughters and for all women in Afghanistan."<sup>102</sup> Many women cited the negative impact of being confined to the home and dependent on "pocket money" from their husbands.<sup>103</sup> They link this, along with their households' financial hardship, to depression, anxiety, and loss of hope for themselves and their peers.<sup>104</sup> The most extreme manifestation of these psychological impacts has been an "endemic" of girls and women committing suicide in Afghanistan.<sup>105</sup>

Restrictions on girls and women's employment leave households with minimal opportunities to earn an income. Households are turning to negative and risky coping mechanisms to feed their families and survive.<sup>106</sup> Households and individuals are migrating to find work and selling belongings of any value.<sup>107</sup> They are also turning to cheaper and less nutritious food.<sup>108</sup> As households become more vulnerable, families are selling the tools and livestock they rely on to earn a living, jeopardizing long-term income generation to meet their immediate needs.<sup>109</sup> People are postponing vital medical treatment.<sup>110</sup> At least half of all rural households and more than one quarter of urban households, as of August 2022, had turned to harmful coping mechanisms, including begging, selling their homes, selling their organs, taking on dangerous work, and marrying off their young daughters to receive a dowry.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to its economic impacts, the social and psychological toll of girls' and women's exclusion from employment has been substantial. Limitations on girls' and women's employment are ultimately contributing to a process of "freezing women out of public spaces and into state-enforced seclusion."<sup>112</sup> Combined with a general lack of economic security, girls and women's isolation and their reduced ability to generate income are correlated with diminished decision-making influence and unequal domestic power dynamics, and have been linked to increased domestic violence.<sup>113</sup>

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- 2 Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: International legal initiative an important step toward tackling the Taliban's war on women*, September 26, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/afghanistan-legal-initiative-talibans-war-on-women/>.
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- 9 “Afghanistan,” World Bank, 2023. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/afghanistan#:~:text=In%20Afghanistan%2C%20the%20labor%20force,older%20that%20is%20economically%20active.>
- 10 UN Women. Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan. New York: UN Women, 2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gender-index-2024-afghanistan-en.pdf>
- 11 In Islamic law and culture, a mahram is a close male relative—by blood, marriage, or breastfeeding—with whom marriage is permanently forbidden, such as a father, son, brother, or father-in-law. Women are not required to wear hijab around their mahram and may travel with them. In contrast, non-mahram refers to unrelated men with whom marriage is permissible; women are expected to observe hijab in their presence, and unaccompanied travel with non-mahram individuals is generally discouraged to uphold modesty and protection. Rostami-Povey, Elaheh. *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion*. New York: Zed Books, 2007.
- 12 UN Women. Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan. New York: UN Women, 2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/gender-index-2024-afghanistan-en.pdf>
- 13 Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Gender Persecution in Afghanistan: Could it Come Under the ICC’s Afghanistan Investigation?* May 26, 2023, np. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/gender-persecution-in-afghanistan-could-it-come-under-the-iccs-afghanistan-investigation/>.
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- 15 Amnesty International, “Death in Slow Motion.”
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