

CONCLUSION

This report aims to support local and international actors in designing rights-based, gender-just responses for Afghan women and girls. The report offers a detailed and evidence-based analysis of the Taliban's governance from August 2021 to October 2025, with a specific focus on its implications for Afghan women's and girls' rights under CEDAW. It critically examines the legal and institutional rollback of rights and protections in Afghanistan, comparing Taliban laws, decrees, and practices against the normative obligations established under CEDAW's first 16 Articles.

Our report documents that the 2004–2021 Republic Period saw significant—though uneven—gains in gender equality, education, healthcare, and civic participation for Afghan women and girls. However, these advancements have been largely dismantled since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. Following the Taliban's dissolution of key institutions, laws, and policies, and the rejection of the 2004 Constitution, the regime has imposed more than 100 policies and legal instruments that severely curtail women's and girls' fundamental rights.

We find that the Taliban's legal and policy framework has institutionalized systemic, nationwide gender-based discrimination that violates CEDAW. Under the Taliban regime, Afghan women and girls are subjected to routine and widespread discrimination and violence—physical, psychological, economic, political, and social—with impunity.

The Taliban's systematic violations of Afghan women's and girls' rights under CEDAW are underpinning a national crisis. By stripping half the population of their basic human rights—denying them health care, education, employment, freedom of movement and expression, and participation in civil society and political life—the Taliban have not only harmed individual women and girls, they have harmed Afghan families and communities, hampered humanitarian assistance, and stalled international engagement, further isolating Afghanistan from the global community.

Some may argue that with the end of the United States' War in Afghanistan, the country is more peaceful under the Taliban's authoritarian control.

As our report demonstrates, labeling this “peace” is a mistake. The Taliban's violations of women's and girls' rights under CEDAW are not merely symptoms of authoritarian rule—they are a central driver of Afghanistan's economic failure, humanitarian emergency, and social breakdown, evident in the systematic erosion of human rights, the collapse of social services, and the deepening economic and humanitarian crisis.

The Taliban's violations of women's and girls' rights are not only moral or legal failures—they are directly fueling the country's collapse. As families lose access to food, healthcare, education, and livelihoods, the population is becoming weaker, sicker, and less able to recover. The resulting multidimensional poverty affecting 65 percent of Afghans creates a vicious cycle.¹ As families become increasingly impoverished, nutrition deteriorates, morbidity and mortality rise, access to healthcare declines, and child marriage rates rise. The consequences are intergenerational: malnourished children experience cognitive delays and lifelong developmental and behavioral challenges. More girls are married off (and at younger ages) to help ease the financial burdens of poor households. Child marriage violates girls' rights and significantly harms them. It results in more child mothers, who give birth to more children born into poverty, increasing mother and child mortality, and perpetuating a vicious cycle.²

The Taliban's removal of women from the healthcare sector has had severe consequences—Afghanistan now records the world's highest infant mortality rate and the second-highest maternal mortality rate. Far from ending suffering or bringing peace, Taliban rule has replaced war-related deaths with preventable deaths among women and children due to hunger, disease, and childbirth.

When girls are denied education and women are barred from paid employment and humanitarian service, the impact extends far beyond individual lives. Entire communities lose access to critical aid and essential services, leading to growing shortages of food, clean water, healthcare, education, and livelihoods. These restrictions deepen poverty and accelerate the internal collapse of Afghan society, eroding its capacity to recover and sustain itself.

It is well established that the education and empowerment of women are critical to family and community well-being. Under Taliban rule, by preventing girls' education and women's participation in public life, the regime is undermining the foundation of Afghan families and the nation's future.

The regime's policies, and in particular their violations of women's and girls' rights, have made Afghanistan a pariah state, significantly restricting meaningful international engagement. Global aid agencies have cut funding, both because of the Taliban's treatment of women and girls and due to their siphoning of humanitarian assistance for their own use. The defunding of USAID, a major donor for humanitarian assistance even under the Taliban's de facto rule, has worsened an already severe crisis.

Some claim that limited negotiation or flexibility with local Taliban leadership is possible in certain regions, but our research questions such claims. Our research indicates that most Afghans only comply with Taliban decrees to avoid violence against themselves and their families. As demonstrated throughout this report, the Taliban regime maintains control through intimidation and surveillance, turning men—fathers, brothers, husbands—into enforcers of Taliban dictates within their own homes. It is a system of repression that compels obedience through fear.

The international community has grown increasingly unwilling to engage with the Taliban under these conditions. In July 2025, Russia became the only country to formally recognize the Taliban government, while some of the states in the Gulf Cooperation Council have engaged with the Taliban. Almost all other countries refuse any form of cooperation with the Taliban if their repression of women and girls continues. Meanwhile, the Taliban's corruption and diversion of humanitarian aid further erode international trust.

Despite the oppressive environment, Afghan women and girls—alongside national and international allies—continue to resist. Afghan women have mounted sustained resistance to the Taliban's laws and policies, both within the country and in exile. In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's return to power, women took to the streets in protest, publicly opposing the regime's gender-discriminatory decrees. These acts of defiance were met with repression, including arbitrary arrest, torture, sexual violence, and, in some cases,

extrajudicial killings. Despite these risks, women continued their resistance through alternative forms—utilizing social media, engaging in symbolic acts such as appearing in public without a burqa, and operating clandestine schools to educate girls under threat of severe punishment.

Within a highly restrictive sociopolitical environment, Afghan women have also persisted in documenting their own experiences and those of others, seeking to preserve an accurate record of abuses for international audiences. Afghan women and their allies in the diaspora have complemented this internal resistance through global advocacy efforts, including public speaking at international forums such as the United Nations, engaging with media, organizing conferences, and lobbying against the formal recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate government. These efforts also extend to pushing for international legal recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity and seeking accountability through global mechanisms. Afghan women's acts of protest, underground education initiatives, ongoing professional contributions, and international advocacy efforts demonstrate both Afghan women's resilience and their commitment to maintaining visibility and agency.

This report underscores the need for sustained international engagement to both address gender-based discrimination and provide material and other support to Afghan women and girls whose rights are being systematically denied. Countries and international organizations should continue to pressure the Taliban to uphold the rights and dignity of women and girls, while also ensuring that Afghan women's voices shape such engagement. Upholding the rule of law, human dignity, and international legal standards should remain central to global responses. Addressing and mitigating the Taliban's gender-based persecution should remain a global priority.

The way forward is deeply uncertain. The Taliban show no sign of reform, and most of the world remains unwilling to consider normalizing relations with a government that practices gender persecution and gender apartheid. At the same time, women's rights advocates and humanitarians continue to try to find ways to assist women and girls inside Afghanistan, while others document Taliban violations and build legal cases. Some states are exploring strategies for pressuring the Taliban to walk back some of their more hardcore policies, while still trying to find increasingly narrow

pathways to address the suffering of Afghan women, men, girls, and boys.)

What remains clear is that Afghanistan's prospects for peace, stability, and development are inseparable from the restoration of the rights, agency, and full legal and social status of women and girls.

1 *United Nations Development Programme. October 2025. 2025 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Overlapping Hardships - Poverty and Climate Hazards. New York: United Nations Development Programme <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2025-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/MPI>*

2 *Afghanistan Human Rights Center. December 2024. Access to Education for Women. Afghanistan Human Rights Center <https://afghanhrcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Access-to-Education-for-Women.pdf>*