

ENHANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

Summary and findings from the Regional
Convening with Afghan Women Human
Rights Activists and Peacebuilders in
Europe and Central Asia



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1. Introduction

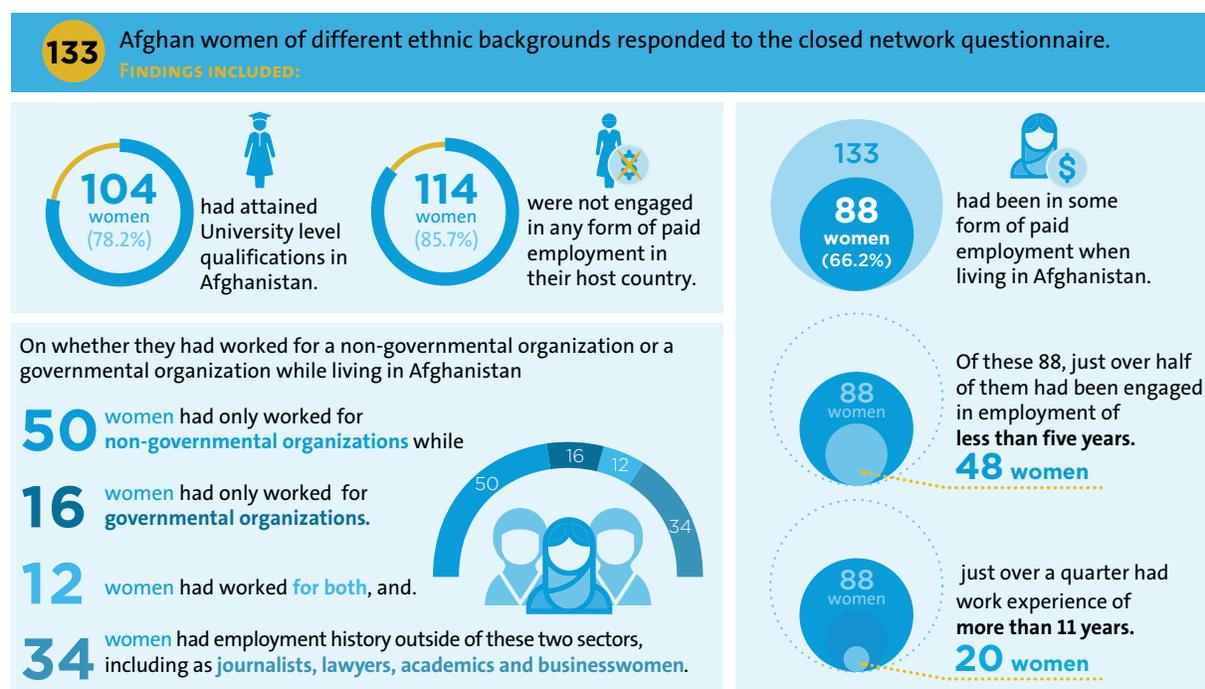
Over a year has passed since the Taliban takeover. Despite initial assurances that they would protect women’s rights within the framework of Sharia law, the Taliban have introduced a set of decrees that limit women and girls’ access to health and education, independent movement, freedom of expression, and association, and right to work. The result: a visible deterioration in the rights, conditions, and socio-political standing for all Afghan women and girls.

[Gender alert no. 2: Women’s rights in Afghanistan one year after the Taliban take-over](#) issued in August 2022 has underlined that Afghan women continue to be systematically excluded from public and political life and restricted in their access to education, humanitarian assistance, employment, justice, and health services. In short, women’s and girls’ lives and prospects are confined to the home.

With the generous financial support of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

GmbH, UN Women conducted a needs assessment in 2022 on priorities and solutions to enhance leadership of Afghan women human rights defenders, peace builders, and peace activists in diaspora countries in Europe and Central Asia. The needs assessment exercise was carried out in three stages - (i) a mapping of 296 Afghan women human rights defenders, peace builders, peace activists and a new generation of activists in diaspora countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan) between January and May (Table 1); (ii) scoping co-creation workshops between June and July that took stock of needs and priorities of Afghan women inside and outside of Afghanistan and jointly explored solutions to tackle identified priorities, issues and capacity gaps; and (iii) validation workshops in August to review and endorse issues, priorities and solutions, and capacity building needs put forward by Afghan women. In connecting with Afghan women, the UN Women Regional Office was guided by the ‘Do No Harm’ principle on conditions of anonymity and confidentiality.

TABLE 1:
Mapping of Afghan women in the diaspora



Before the Taliban takeover, the majority of women had worked in the areas of **gender equality, human rights, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and/or peace building and conflict resolution**. Other work areas included social services, academia, media, the government, and judiciary.



On the **peace and security** situation in Afghanistan, **post-Taliban takeover** **130 women** (97.7%) denied any foreseeable improvement due to many reasons including failure of democracy and democratic values, and community insecurity.

When asked on their thoughts on whether the situation for **women human rights defenders, women peacebuilders, women leaders, civil society and peace activists** who were left behind or chose to stay behind in Afghanistan will improve under Taliban government,



there was no improvement foreseen while the rest were unsure.

When asked to choose **3 issues which they thought had deteriorated or worsened in Afghanistan** since the Taliban takeover,

95
women said
respect for
women and
girl's rights



76
women said
access to
education



42
women said
political
participation.



On their security, safety and protection while being outside of Afghanistan, **38 women** raised concerns for the safety and personal protection for themselves and/or their family while 95 women said they did not have any security concerns.

When asked if Afghan women **had joined networks in the host country** or had reached out and connected with organizations, groups, and/or networks assisting refugees or working on women's rights, of the **107 women** who responded to this question, **51** had undertaken some form of networking.



The Afghan women respondents were invited to share key areas for UN Women to focus on, both inside and outside of Afghanistan that would mitigate relapse of conflict, support peace and reconciliation, and bring results for women, girls and their families and communities.

RESPONSES INCLUDED:

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

- Strategy to facilitate Afghan women's participation in security, conflict and peace in Afghanistan, and greater support for peace and reconciliation
- Capacity development on peace building and negotiations
- Empower Afghan women in the diaspora to speak out against the Taliban's injustices towards women
- Provide dialogue platforms for peace
- Provide safe public spaces for women
- Advocate for freedom of choice, freedom of speech and freedom of media

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND EMPOWERMENT

- Educational support including visa issuance and scholarships
- Income generation opportunities
- Legal and financial support
- Greater assistance to women in Afghanistan to reclaim their basic human rights and lives and livelihoods
- Healthcare and free access to medical centers

WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- Supporting active political participation of women in government

AWARENESS RAISING

- Media coverage of the deteriorating situation of women's rights in Afghanistan

EVIDENCE GENERATION

- Document violations of women rights by the Taliban



Despite the growing challenges, Afghan women leaders inside - and outside - the country continue to advocate for their rights and an inclusive Afghanistan, against all odds, across the country, calling for the return of the full spectrum of women's rights, and an inclusive society.¹ Afghan women leaders are finding ways to reclaim spaces and call attention to the urgency of acting on global commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

Amidst the rapidly deteriorating environment for women's rights, more spaces need to be created for women impacted by conflicts and crises to exercise their agency and articulate their priorities in a context where there is little room to maneuver. This includes space for Afghan women inside and outside the country so they can come together and reflect on strategies needed to advance their diminishing fundamental rights and identify actors and levers to engage with.

In response to Afghan women's demands (including from UN Women's needs assessment) and in galvanizing regional action, UN Women in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan convened a

regional dialogue on 29-30 November 2022 in Almaty. The convening in hybrid format brought together 37 Afghan women and youth with 14 women experts from Central Asia (on National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)), and other regional leaders advocating for women's rights and an inclusive Afghanistan.

In strategizing on how to influence the most pressing women's rights issues and challenges in Afghanistan, participants:

- a. Identified challenges for women inside and outside the country;
- b. Reflected on priorities and practical actions that the Central Asia region can take to advance women's rights in Afghanistan; and
- c. Put forward "Asks" to the international community.

The regional convening strengthened solidarity between women leaders in Central Asia and Afghan women to advance the human rights of Afghan women and those affected by conflicts and crises.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/facing-critical-human-rights-challenges-afghanistan-crossroads-says-un>

2. Challenges for women inside Afghanistan and Afghan women in the diaspora

Women of Afghanistan are facing a multiple of crises with continual deterioration of Afghan women and girls' rights and fall-back of decades of gains made for gender equality.

During this session, UN Women prioritized hearing directly from Afghan women in and outside the country on their challenges and struggles relating to their human rights and gender inclusive development. Challenges included social and cultural changes, health-related, political limitations, economic constrictions, and legal bottlenecks.

Social and cultural changes

Challenges and constraints centred on violations to women's human rights, unavailability of social infrastructure, denial to education, diminishing civic freedom and fragmented solidarity.

- i. Women emphasized increased discriminatory treatment against women and girls, continued systematic oppression of women in many fields, and the fate on women due to the Taliban's changing (degenerating) mindset on women's rights and equality. Some concerns to their rights include:
 - Reversal of hard-earned gender equality gains.
 - Increased difficulties for women led organizations and civil society to work and implement projects (many have already shut down).
 - Lack of women's rights awareness programmes, for the Taliban and men and boys
 - Continual inequality and injustice being targeted to women and girls.
 - Widening of already restrictive boundaries for women and girls in all spheres of life
 - Distress that women may become even more inactive vocally.
- ii. With the unavailability of basic social infrastructures to women and girls, they were also side-lined from being able to access housing and social services.
- iii. Access to quality education and educational institutes continues to be denied to women and girls:
 - This is being further hampered with their lack of access to educational resources including internet, digital equipment, and electricity.
 - Women and girls are also having their voices and choices silenced when selecting higher education fields of study.
 - There is concern of women, girls and youth being brainwashed with Taliban ideology once back in educational institutes.
 - Women in the diaspora have limited finances to continue their studies and are experiencing language barriers.
 - A longer-term concern is that Afghanistan will have a generation of illiteracy and brain drain due to loss of its most skilled and educated citizens.
- iv. Diminishing civic freedom and safe spaces are affecting women and girls more:
 - They have no opportunities for social and public activities and fear their removal (participation and representation) from the public sphere.
 - They are restricted in what to and what not to wear.
 - They have no freedom of thought and expression and imposed wide-ranging internet and media censorship women cannot raise their voice and ask for their rights, including against the Taliban's dictation of what they should (and should not) say.

- Movement restrictions have confined women to their homes making them dependent on mahram [male chaperone], further curtailing women's rights.
- v. Limited spaces and platforms for Afghan women's unity and solidarity has fragmented the women's movement between Afghan women in country and outside. For women in the diaspora, this is a huge constraint. There is also no unified messages and voices of Afghan women with women activists and leaders in surrounding countries and regions.

Health-related challenges

Challenges and constraints identified here included psychological issues, early and forced marriages, enforced disappearances, food insecurities and access to healthcare:

- i. Women and girls are living with trauma and the psychological impact of the conflict, displacement, fleeing their homes or country and where possible, rebuilding lives and livelihoods. Psychosocial issues include depression, anxiety, and anger, and these are increasing due to new pressures.
- ii. Girls are increasing at risk of early and forced marriages - fewer mouths to feed when have been banned from attending school and sparing parents from marrying their daughter to members of the Taliban.
- iii. Arrests and enforced disappearances of women and women activists remain concerns for women's security and safety. Personal safety is a concern for all women and girls.
- iv. With many households struggling with food insecurities, at risk women have exacerbated struggles to access nourishing food and water. There is long-term concerns of malnutrition and increased poverty.
- v. Women obtaining access to primary health care and medical support continues to remain a challenge, including for disabled and other vulnerable women. Restriction on their movements without a mahram has added to their reduced access to healthcare services.

Political limitations

Challenges and issues raised here related to geopolitics and humanitarian aid, governance and accountability, women in politics and decision-making, political activism, and regional security:

- i. Afghanistan is highly dependent on international aid. Concerns were raised on how humanitarian aid is supported "political funding" and channelled. There are no oversight mechanisms or conditionalities on how the Taliban are spending aid/funds - and how much is directed towards women's human rights. This has cast doubts of inequitable and gender unequal distribution of aid. With unmonitored distribution of international aid, and no accountability or aid reporting mechanisms from the grassroots to governance, there are concerns on who is using the aid? Purpose of use? And aid recipients - people of Afghanistan or Taliban?
- ii. Women are becoming invisible in informal governance structures and support systems, and key government departments and institutions mandated to monitor and promote human rights and women's rights are dissolved such as Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission the Ministry of Women's Affairs. There is no accountability of the Taliban's actions to Afghans or the international community.
- iii. There are restrictions on Afghan women in decision-making positions and dialogue forums vis-à-vis peace in Afghanistan. With diminishing representation and participation of women in politics and political parties, women will be made invisible in the society.
- iv. Afghan women's participation in political activism including defending their basic rights, is restricted and controlled. They have no freedom to engage in political activities inside and outside the country, fearing reprimand, enforced disappearance and torture.
- v. There is great concern that the situation for Afghan women and their rights, will be normalized politically and by the international community. Not enough is being done by international actors to pressurize the Taliban to provide rights to

women. This silence could fuel creation of a “terrorist” country.

- vi. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the Taliban coming back into power can spur other terrorist groups to gain power in the region if there is no stronger or timely engagement with Taliban government. There is a lack of policies to tackle the spread of terrorism including through migration. In the longer-term, this can lead to regional and transborder threats to women’s rights.

Economic constrictions

Challenges include scarce or no economic and livelihood opportunities for women and young girls.

- i. Women continue to be denied access to workplaces in most work sectors. Having lost their jobs and the right to work, and with women being confined to their homes, they are becoming increasingly financially insecure. This economic and financial disadvantage means they face further barriers in reclaiming their already diminishing human rights.. For women in the diaspora, they too are

experiencing loss of livelihood opportunities and financial insecurity due their visa status and temporary stay permits.

- ii. Afghanistan’s crippling economy faces critical challenges. There are no economic or business conditionalities linked to human rights and women in employment in the country’s economic relations including trade with bordering countries. These are additional socio-economic barriers that are keeping Afghan women out of the workforce and further depriving them of livelihoods and economic empowerment.

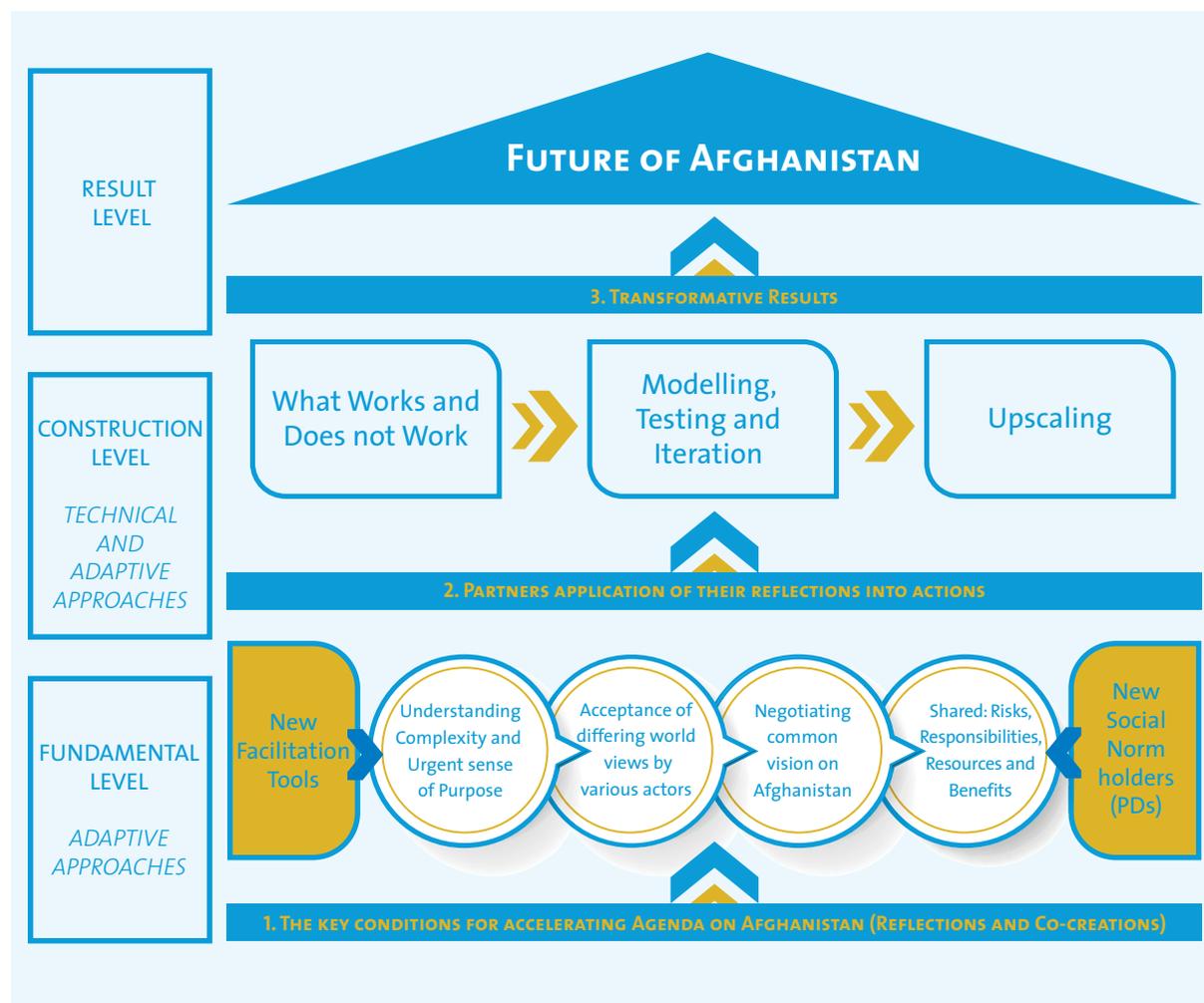
Legal bottlenecks

The foremost challenge here for women and their families in the diaspora is that they are living with temporary visas and uncertain futures as their asylum and citizenship applications remain unanswered. With a lack of documentation, legal issues, passport validity and restrictive visa regimes, Afghan women cannot resume studies nor secure work (including highly qualified women).

3. Reflecting on the region: what practical actions can Central Asia take to advance women's rights in Afghanistan

During this session, UN Women created space for reflection by Afghan women human rights defender and women experts from Central Asia and surrounding

countries to explore ways to work more effectively together to advance women's rights in Afghanistan, and the region.



In triggering the discussion on entry points and practical actions to promote the women’s human rights agenda in Afghanistan, participants were guided to:

- i. Identify most urgent priorities to focus on (from those previous exercise)
- ii. Identify regional opportunities - Why would the region be interested? What is the interest in Afghanistan? What is the influence of the region?
- iii. Identify the role of potential partners - Who do you work with, or should work with, to address the priority action?
- iv. Discuss existing initiatives or interventions that may have already been started, and by who?
- v. Identify what else needs to be developed or implemented - What further steps need to be taken to move the priority action forward? What is not happening that needs to take place?
- vi. Resources and support needed - financial, human, and political resources?

TABLE 1.2:
Target population groups of the qualitative research

Priority action 1 - Political Alliances for Stability and Security in Afghanistan, bordering countries and the region	
Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Afghanistan is strategically located ➤ It is rich in resources (which is of interest to neighboring countries and the region) ➤ Countries in Central and South Asia have economic trade with Afghanistan ➤ Economic trade and investments can increase the GDP of the country and region ➤ Regional political stability and security is connected to Afghanistan's political stability and security ➤ International and intergovernmental organizations have a very important and influential role for Afghanistan's political stability <p><i>Security concern - Interconnected borders to Central and South Asia, political insecurity in Afghanistan and increased terrorism represents a collective issue for neighboring countries, threatening their common interests and security.</i></p>	<p>Dialogues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continue with regular and official international/regional level dialogues on Afghanistan’s political stability and security ➤ Engage religious leaders as partners to interact with the Taliban for women to reclaim their rights ➤ Afghanistan must be represented in dialogues of regional organizations ➤ Civil society, women leaders and peacebuilders must be included in the dialogues ➤ Capacity building of Afghan women to engage in political activism and decision-making <p>Political recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consensus of the international community to (or not to) formally recognize the de-facto government ➤ Mutual consent of the Afghan people to be taken if the Taliban are to (or not to) be politically recognized ➤ Cut-off of military support/equipment to the Taliban (unless monitored) <p>Policy reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review regional policies to make them supportive of the people of Afghanistan (reviewed with a human rights-based approach and gender lens) <p>Regional security and action plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage civil society and experts on WPS to develop regional security plans (while countries have while countries have National Action Plans (NAPs) on 1325, they do not include transborder or cross- boundary issues of the region) ➤ Regional NAP on 1325 for the protection of rights for Afghan women and other women impacted by crises and conflicts

Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Central and South Asia countries ➤ Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) ➤ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)² ➤ Relevant UN agencies ➤ I/NGOS's ➤ Women's networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financial support conditioned with strong monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms internally and externally, from the grassroots to governance ➤ Political support for permanent stability in the country without external interferences ➤ Regional cooperation organizations including the OIC must take on the Afghanistan agenda and discuss their role and responsibility in making Afghanistan politically stable and secure, with a conducive environment for women's rights and their advancement

Priority action 2 - A Women's Summit, unity for Afghan women

Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
<p>Greater unity and solidarity for Afghan women and with women leaders in neighboring countries and regions</p>	<p><u>Women's summit</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Organize a women-led high-level meeting with participation of women in any level of formal politics and other women leaders from regional countries to advocate for Afghan women's rights and their inclusion, including in their authority and government, and at national, regional and global platforms <p><u>Regional network</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A regional network and dialogue between Afghan women and women leaders from the region and bordering countries including Iran and Pakistan ➤ Women from these countries play an important role in helping and improving situation the situation for Afghan women
Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>UN Women and international partners</i> ➤ <i>Women leaders</i> 	<p>Political support, strategic engagement and commitment from women leaders in surrounding regional countries</p>

2 The SCO, a Eurasian political, economic and security forum founded in 2001, is comprised of eight member states: China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan (with Iran soon to join). Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia are observer states, while Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Türkiye are dialogue partners.

Priority action 3 - A Regional Alliance of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
CSOs and women-led organizations who play an important role in raising awareness of the women's rights crisis and human rights violation of Afghan women and women impacted by conflicts and crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A regional summit with participation of CSOs and political leaders of Central and South Asia ➤ Creation of a new narrative "human rights plus security" - to secure women's human rights from future instability and insurgency in Afghanistan ➤ Lessons learned on what has/is happening in Afghanistan regarding women's rights violations, increased extremism and fundamentalism to avoid it spreading to Central Asia and surrounding countries and regions
Role of potential partners:	Resources and support needed:
<p>Existing initiatives are being led by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Afghan women as partners/allies ➤ Civil society 	Political support, strategic engagement and commitment from CSOs in surrounding regional countries

Priority action 4 - Women's economic empowerment

Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
Women's socio-economic integration will have a direct impact on their lives and on Afghanistan's political, economic and regional cooperation - a must for the country's survival and prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More socio-economic support for women and women-led organizations ➤ Secure women's human security with at least 30% of women should be visible in employment, dialogues, etc., including in donor or other supportive projects (with encouraging eligibility criteria) ➤ More women at the level of decision-making
Role of potential partners:	Resources and support needed:
CSOs and women-led organizations who play an important role in raising awareness of the women's rights crisis and human rights violation of Afghan women and women impacted by conflicts and crises	<u>Project funding and capital resources</u> to be provided by the international community for programmes to enhance women's socio-economic empowerment

Priority action 5 - Strengthening Central Asia as a voice and advocate for women's human rights

Regional opportunities:	What work/initiatives need to be developed or implemented?
<p>Longer-term and regional investments in preventing and countering violent extremism and security for lasting results in regional security in Central Asia</p>	<p><u>Space for civil society</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reverse shrinking public and civic space for civil society and women activists ➤ Donors and development partners in providing aid to Central Asia countries must have a pre-requisite to support and not liquidate CSOs or their activism in the country and region <p><u>Single regional approach to the Taliban</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Need a common position of governments of the region in relation to the Afghan regime ➤ Engage civil society and experts on WPS to develop a single regional approach towards the Taliban and their threat (a position paper for advocacy to Central Asia governments) <p><u>Regional programming on violent extremism and security</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sensitization of donors and international partners of the need for longer-term and inter-regional programmes inclusive of human rights and women's rights ➤ Regional interstate structures to have agendas for human development and women's rights ➤ Donors and development partners should provide prerequisites for ODA ➤ Development and scaling up of integration programme for Afghans and other conflict impacted communities - tolerance, education, employment, etc. <p><u>Regional information sharing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Information sharing between countries on what governments are doing for Afghanistan, their position on Afghanistan - interaction with government agencies to form a pool of necessary information, mutual exchanges ➤ Dialogue meetings of the Shanghai Cooperation (Secretaries of the Security Council) to include in their agenda Afghan women's human rights and rights of women in regional countries ➤ Common platform to Central Asia as a voice and advocate for women's human rights and motivate CSOs/experts to come to such regional platforms and talk about partnerships, capacity and commitments to working for women's human rights
Role of potential partners:	Resources and support needed:
<p>CSOs and women-led organizations who play an important role in raising awareness of the women's rights crisis and human rights violation of Afghan women and women impacted by conflicts and crises</p>	<p>Project funding and capital resources to be provided by the international community for programmes to enhance women's socio-economic empowerment</p>

4. Dialogue between Afghan women and representatives from international organizations

During this session Afghan women were provide space to share key messages and suggested recommendations to the following UN and development partners:

- Her Excellency Ms. Terhi Hakala, European Union (EU) Special Representative for Central Asia
- Ms. Mmabatlharo Dihemo, Senior Gender Adviser, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- Ms. Vera Stobachova-Budway, Senior Co-ordination Adviser for Gender Issues, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The dialogue was moderated by Ms. Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women.

Key messages and recommendations from Afghan women

Coordination, messaging, and civic spaces

1. There is a **disconnect and lack of coordination** in regional countries towards Taliban
2. There is **no joint message on women's human rights** - support coordination and collaboration between the Central Asian countries and women CSOs and actors – both Afghan women CSOs and actors and Central Asian women CSOs and actors – to take concerted approach and actions
3. **Shrinking civic spaces** for CSOs in regional countries
4. No free public space for women, unless accompanied with a Mahram (male guardian)

Solidarity and the WPS agenda

5. There is urgent need to **build on the momentum of solidarity**, towards greater unity and alliances as a prerequisite for one voice, strong advocacy, and joint actions on Afghanistan
6. The situation in Afghanistan is a worrying sign for the whole world on **how fragile women's rights are and how easily the progress on WPS can be reversed**
7. **How do we position ourselves** - as a Central Asian region of women change makers – and agreeing on the **common vision for peace and security** as a prerequisite for alliance and joint actions
8. **A women's summit** towards a common vision and roadmap for action is needed to support building and strengthening solidarity and collaboration amongst women organizations and actors, both amongst Afghan women actors and between Afghan and Central Asian women actors
9. A **summit with states** of Central Asia and Iran, Pakistan as well as women CSOs and actors on formulating a **common gender-responsive foreign policy approach** to Afghanistan development and engagement with the de facto government.
10. Continue to support the WPS agenda and **implementation of National Action Plans on 1325, and regional plans** especially on building linkages and synergies between WPS agenda with the broader set of human security factors including the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Monitoring and documentation of human rights violations and the situation in Afghanistan

11. Need to develop a **roadmap for addressing current human rights violations and gender inequalities** in Afghanistan, to be made and compiled by a large group of Afghan women including from within Afghanistan.
12. Monitoring, documenting, and reporting on the **state of human rights and violations of women's rights** is needed and findings to be shared so these are recognized as gender equality violations, gender genocides and apartheid.
13. Need to monitor the **changed regional dynamics particularly on the WPS agenda** as a result of the situation in Afghanistan.
14. Need to continue **sharing of up-to-date information on the situation in Afghanistan and the women's rights** as well as the situation of Afghans in diaspora to inform and guide the actions of the international community and the countries in the region.

Collaborations with regional and humanitarian organizations

15. There's disappointment in the silence of Islamic countries - what the Taliban are doing towards Afghan women is against Islamic values. Need to **convene regional Islamic organizations and actors to have a common approach** to and engagement with de facto government with dialogues on women's position in society and ensuring protection of women's rights.
16. There is a need to apply **conditionality on human rights compliance to development aid** as a prerequisite to the de facto government.

Freedom of movement, education, and employment

17. Issues are being faced in **extension of visas** for women and human rights defenders in diaspora countries - with only 1-2 months' visas, women are unable to travel for advocacy work, such as

to today's event. Support is needed to lobby and advocate host countries of Afghan women and Afghan displaced people to access and receive legal status and services to address the issues of illegal status and temporary visa challenges.

18. Ensure continued attention to and support to **education of girls and young women**.
19. Provide opportunities for Afghan diaspora especially young women example in form of **internships and employments** in international organizations and scholarships to universities and education institutions in host countries.

Responses of the international organizations

Her Excellency Ms. Terhi Hakala, EU Special Representative for Central Asia

- ▶ **International focus on Afghan women's human rights** - Dedicated to continuing advocacy and raising the issue of women's right in Afghanistan and the situation of Afghan women in international platforms through, inter alia, Special Envoy of EU. Shared disappointment at how the women's human rights situation is unfolding every day in Afghanistan.
- ▶ **Technical and humanitarian assistance** - Committed to continue technical assistance in Afghanistan, 'humanitarian Plus aid', that focus on the key sectors: education, service provision health care and among others providing funding to cover salaries of women civil servants. While humanitarian aid will continue, efforts are sadly not materializing into results yet.
- ▶ **Legal issues of Afghan women in diaspora** - Acknowledged the urgent issue of legal statuses of Afghan women in diaspora and that this is a big issue for many. Committed to convey this message to the leaders of the countries through various channels and will keep bringing this up in dialogues.
- ▶ **Women's summit** - Welcomed the idea of a women-led high-level meeting.

Ms. Mmabatlharo Dihemo, Senior Gender Adviser, UNAMA

- **Monitoring and reporting on human rights** - Committed to continual monitoring and reporting on the issues of human rights and WPS as per its mandate, and on women's economic, social and cultural rights.
- **Dialogue with the Taliban** - Noted there are challenges with the de facto government on advocacy and accountability. While there is painstaking work on the ground, shared that engagement and dialogue with the de facto government is regular. UNAMA will continue to facilitate bilateral dialogues with Afghan women in country with the Taliban.
- **Regional engagement** - Acknowledged the importance of regional focus and engagement across-borders for solidarity, greater convening power and protection of women's rights and advancing the WPS agenda.

Ms. Vera Stobachova-Budway, Senior Co-ordination Adviser for Gender Issues, OSCE

- **OSCE's mandate** - While OSCE has engaged Afghan women peacebuilders and supported Central Asian countries in their engagement with the situation in Afghanistan, OSCE is not mandated to work directly in Afghanistan.

- **Findings from consultations** held with women CSOs in Central Asia on Afghanistan early 2022 and emerging recommendations of the dialogues reflects issues raised today.
- **Women's summit** - Welcomed the idea of a women-led high-level meeting - as a network/platform for women leaders in Central Asia and surrounding countries/regions. Will discuss more with EU and UN Women to hold a women's summit on Afghan women's rights.
- **Inclusive dialogues** - there is a need for inclusive dialogue and for engaging the religious community, and men and boys.
- **Country NAPs on 1325** - Committed to continue to explore how Central Asian women CSOs, actors, and state actors can further support the development in Afghanistan and ensure women's rights in the whole region, especially through the NAP 1325 work.
- **Regional NAP on 1325** - Suggested for it to specifically look at the common issues in the region particularly Afghanistan.
- **Data and statistics** - Acknowledged the need for continued and in-depth data and statistics on the situation in Afghanistan and its regional implications on human rights and women's human rights for strategic actions.

5. Conclusions

Discussions and deliberations of two-day regional convening by UN Women made it overwhelmingly clear that women do need to come together more **to keep the spotlight on gender inequalities and violations of women's human rights by the de facto government in Afghanistan. Silence, acceptance, or normalcy of the problem is not an option any longer.**

The international community have a critical role since current actions and statements are not tangibly improving lives of women in Afghanistan. They need to be consistent with accountable commitments and reliable spaces to bring Afghan women and partners together. The suggestion to condition international aid to progress on gender equality and women's rights was welcomed.

CSO partners from Central Asia and international development actors committed to continue to **communicate through all channels about the violation of women's rights in conflicts and crises**, and the role that regional mechanisms and groups have in galvanizing regional action on how to influence peace and the most pressing issues facing women and girls in the Central Asia region and in Afghanistan.

Priority areas and solutions put forward by Afghan women inside and outside the country and by regional experts from Central Asia will be considered and taken forward, including a women-led high-level summit on Afghan women's rights.

**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND
THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.
A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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