

AFGHANISTAN PROGRESS REPORT

Gains and Growth in Women's Status and Opportunities

Key Indicators and Facts

*"Discrimination against women is not our culture."
President Ashraf Ghani, Sept. 2017*

The situation for women in Afghanistan has undergone a **fundamental change since the Taliban were ousted from power** in 2001 and the Afghan Constitution was adopted in 2004. The dark years of religious fundamentalism and gender oppression are firmly in the country's past and today **women and girls are breaking down barriers** and achieving once unimaginable goals.

Guided by the belief that Afghanistan's security, strength as a **democracy and economic stability is intertwined with gender equality and equal rights**, the National Unity Government under President Ashraf Ghani has made the expansion and elevation of women's status and opportunities one of its National Priority Programs (1).

'The National Unity Government (NUG) has committed to women's empowerment...recognizing that without institutionalizing the equal rights of women, the country will never be able to stabilize and develop in a sustainable way.' *UN WOMEN*

In 2017, the **National Women's Economic Empowerment Program** was launched to create four long term, measurable changes: an improved legal, political and workplace environment for women; an improved environment for women to start or expand a business; increase participation by women in markets and the private sector; and growing the status of and participation by women in communities and civil institutions. (2)

Improvements in women's lives have been significant and continue to multiply. Women's access to healthcare services has increased, growing ranks of female police officers, lawyers and judges have expanded women's access to justice, and maternal and infant mortality rates have dropped. (3)

Today, women in Afghanistan are working or involved in nearly every sector of the nation and are helping shape their country's future:

- ◆ Nearly 20 percent of women participate in the workforce. (4)
- ◆ More than 78,000 women have been appointed to government positions since 2001 and over 8,000 women currently hold government offices. (5)
- ◆ Twenty-eight percent of Parliament members are women —a proportion higher than 67 percent of countries tracked by the World Bank, including France, Canada, Poland, Australia and the United States. (6)
- ◆ Afghanistan has four female cabinet members, 240 female judges, eight deputy ministers, three ambassadors and a female deputy chair of the High Peace Council. (7)
- ◆ The *Women in Government Program* places 3,000 female university graduates in paid civil service internships, giving them the skills and experience for their future careers. (8)
- ◆ The Strategy and Action Plan for the Integration of Female Police has introduced 1,300 female police officers to Afghanistan's National Security and Defense Forces and more than 2,000 armed service members are female. (9)



Challenges

When Afghan women are asked what their two most significant challenges are, they identify education (38%), domestic violence (22%), unemployment (22%), lack of rights (21%), and forced marriage (15%).(10)

Almost 60% of girls are married by 16 and it is estimated that up to 80 percent of marriages in poor rural areas are either forced or arranged. Most girls marry far older men — some in their 60s — whom they meet for the first time at their wedding.

Around 87 percent of Afghan women experience at least one form of gender-based violence in their lifetime. (12)

~~2) Women's Economic Empowerment National~~

1) *Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program*, World Bank <http://projects.worldbank.org/P163267?lang=en>

2) *Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program*, World Bank

3) *UN Women: Asia and The Pacific* <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/afghanistan>

4) *UN Women: Asia and The Pacific*

5) *Afghanistan: Before and After the Taliban* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26747712>

6) *Pricenomics: Afghanistan Has More Women in National Parliament Seats Than the U.S.* <https://pricenomics.com/afghanistan-has-more-women-in-national-parliament/>

7) *UN Women: Asia and The Pacific*

8) *USAID, Promote: Women in Government Overview* <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/promote-women-government>

9) *AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON UNSCR 1325-WOMEN,*

PEACE, AND SECURITY https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/wps-afghanistan_national_action_plan_1325_0.pdf

10) <https://asiafoundation.org/2017/12/13/afghanistan-gender-not-always-indicator-support-womens-rights/>

11) *A Glance at Challenges of Afghan Women*, June 29, 2016 http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=15646