

Progress in Afghanistan country in 2021

Data as of:
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OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_1.2

Women have improved capacity, access to resources/knowledge and agency to participate, lead and engage in political processes, including running as elective officials in Afghanistan

In its normative role, UN Women supported the reinforcement of understanding of Afghan women Members of Parliament on gender-sensitive legislation. This was made possible through the development of a gender strategy, a Terms of Reference for a women parliamentarian's caucus group and women's affairs commission in the Afghan Parliament, and a transformational leadership programme that was anticipated to support all women Members of Parliament to promote gender equality in Afghanistan and facilitate the revision of existing laws (requiring revision or parliamentary approval). The gender strategy aimed to elevate the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment in the parliamentary structure by providing the basis for the promotion of dialogue and action in addressing gender issues within the country, and by bringing more coherence to the work of the various entities engaged in these issues in the Afghan Parliament. With the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, there has been a dramatic reversal of progress on women's participation in political life. By the end of the reporting period, women's political participation stood at zero – before 15 August 2021, 28 per cent of parliamentarians were women. UN Women had prepared to deliver Gender-Sensitive Media Training to journalists from various media backgrounds, including the traditional, and digital media, to foster an environment where the interests, experiences, and realities of Afghan women become part of the public agenda. Capacity building training was planned for quarter 3 of 2021 but did not take place due to the deteriorating security situation and changes in the operating context following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_3.2

Favorable social norms, attitudes, and behaviors are promoted at individual, community and institutional levels to prevent VAW

Violence against women has been a consistent feature of many Afghan women and girls' lives. Even before the fall of the Republic of Afghanistan, rates of violence against women and girls were already extremely high across the country, with one study suggesting that 87 per cent of Afghan women experience some form of violence during their lifetime. As a critical step for the development of the National Primary Prevention Framework, UN Women Afghanistan finalized the desk review and training materials on primary prevention, contributing to understanding among key stakeholders (including government, civil society organizations, and donor partners) on what constitutes primary prevention, and supporting the engagement of these stakeholders in developing the Framework. Furthermore, UN Women implemented awareness programmes focused on strengthening understanding of women's rights and violence against women and girls within communities, as well as COVID-19 preventive measures and guidance to mitigate the spread of the virus. A total of 1,966 women and 1,744 men (during the first and second quarters of 2021) improved their understanding of women's rights, human rights, and violence against women and girls, as well as COVID-19 preventive measures within local communities. However, security challenges, instability, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were exacerbated by the fall of the Republican Government and the abolishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs, the national women's machinery, extensively affecting the implementation of the primary prevention workshops and any subsequent development of the Framework.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_3.3

Women survivors of VAWG have increased access to quality, comprehensive services

In the lead-up to and following 15 August 2021, access to coordinated, comprehensive, and quality services for survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG) deteriorated, while the need for services increased. Many service points were suspended and referral pathways were disrupted. UN Women thereby supported all partners to sustain their organizational structures and internal practices, with some partners continuing to provide services to VAWG survivors in Kabul – limited to providing safe accommodation and (some) psycho-social support. As of the end of 2021, two Women Protection Centers (WPCs) and three Family Guidance Centers (FGCs) were (re)operational, while partners continued to seek entry points and approvals for the reopening of further centers across other provinces. Furthermore, a quality assessment of the services offered at the WPCs/FGCs was conducted to identify areas for improvement and to standardize the quality of services for VAWG survivors, in line with international standards and best practices. The assessment was finalized and a summary was translated to Dari and Pashto. The assessment documents the existing models and identifies key areas for improvement, including the need for centers that offer a range of services for women and their children; building a case management approach that applies a survivor-centered approach and focuses on the empowerment of women; and maintaining quality and accessible comprehensive services across the country, including through the reinstitution of support helplines and provision of vocational training. The findings of the assessment are being used to inform the redesign and reopening of the centers.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_3.4

An enabling legislative and policy environment in line with international standards on EVAW is in place and translated into action

Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law was enacted as a Presidential Decree in 2009 and was enforced across the country for the last 11 years. With the Taliban seizing power, the EVAW law is no longer being enforced or implemented. However, at the beginning of 2021, UN Women and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), provided technical support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its provincial departments to review the implementation of the 2009 EVAW Law. Before the launch of the report, the fall of the Government caused the activity to be suspended.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_4.1

An enabling environment for the implementation of WPS commitments is fostered.

During the reporting period, UN Women carried out the preparations for the dissemination of the "First Progress Report of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 1325 Phase II" and the organization of a series of workshops on Data Collection and monitoring and evaluation. The workshops were expected to provide NAP 1325 focal points in each line minister with guidance on data collection methodologies and tools. In light of the prevailing political instability (and lack of political will), the workshops were postponed. Furthermore, technical support aimed at driving gender-responsive security-sector reform (SSR) was provided by UN Women to the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) up until the Taliban takeover. UN Women supported the finalization of an SSR project plan for the MoIA aimed at creating a long-term, enabling environment that streamlines efforts to improve the meaningful participation of women in the national

policy; and supports the implementation of the “Women in Police Roadmap” and its implementation plan (approved by the MoIA Deputy Minister for Strategy and Policy at the beginning of 2021). From August 2021 onward, UN Women adjusted its Women, Peace, and Security programming to further focus on strengthening Women and Human Rights Defender and CSO advocacy and monitoring capacities. UN Women Afghanistan, through its coordination role as Secretariat for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Working Group and under the leadership of the respective Co-Chairs continued to convene regular coordination meetings on the operationalization of the WPS framework. Timely briefings were provided to WPS working group members by various representatives of the Government, as well as CSO members and women leaders, and meetings facilitated coordination among different stakeholders. The Country Office continued to elevate the WPS agenda in Afghanistan by facilitating high-level events and preparing briefings to inform strategic decision-making on WPS priorities in Afghanistan. These included briefings to the Informal Expert Group meetings on WPS in Afghanistan under the Taliban; briefing at the Noon Briefing, on two occasions; and reporting on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan under the de facto authority. UN Women also facilitated the first delegation of Afghan women leaders to provide a briefing on the world stage in the aftermath of the fall of Kabul. The delegation of women leaders engaged in events during the 1325 Open Debate week in New York, USA (in October 2021). Afghan women leaders delivered briefings in a closed-door dialogue co-hosted by Norway and Qatar, and publicly at a high-level event (covered on UN TV) hosted by the United Kingdom and Canada. Over 150 media clippings were generated as a result of the week’s events. UN Women also facilitated the participation of two Afghan women civil society briefers at United Nations Security Council (UNSC) discussions in Q3 of 2021 and provided technical contributions to the report by the Secretary-General “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security”, presented to the UNSC.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_3.5

Civil society organizations are able to advocate on, and prevent and respond to VAWG through support from the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund & Spotlight Initiative Fund

Before the fall of Kabul, UN Women finalized and signed six project documents with civil society partners selected within the framework of the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)-Spotlight Initiative, with 10 additional partnerships under finalization. UN Women conducted a rapid assessment to understand the status and operability of the WPHF-Spotlight grantees. All grantees expressed their willingness to continue to implement the proposed programmes, highlighting that their interventions were now more than ever needed. Following the European Union, Spotlight Initiative, and WPHF confirmation that the project can move forward in the new country context, UN Women liaised with the 16 organizations to support them through the contracting and project finalization process.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_4.2

Women are represented and meaningfully participate in all peace and security, peace-building, recovery and humanitarian processes, including formal and informal peace negotiations and forums

The year 2021 began with a sense of optimism surrounding the intra-Afghan talks between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Women’s participation in the talks was low: only 4 of the 21-member Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) negotiating team were women; the Taliban negotiating team had no women. The other two entities in the Republic of Afghanistan peace architecture –the State Ministry of Peace (SMP) and the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) included only a handful of women at the leadership level. In collaboration with the Afghanistan Independent

Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), UN Women also developed thematic analytical briefs to inform the topics being discussed at the Track 1 peace talks. Despite the disparity in the female: male ratio among negotiators, the mere presence of (any) women leaders in Track 1 negotiations elevated the voice of women in Afghanistan, and, indeed, other conflict-affected areas of the globe. This was achieved with the support of the Afghanistan Country Office (ACO), with negotiators appointed from the pool of senior women peacebuilders and networks at the provincial and grassroots level (Tracks II, III), securing high visibility and political recognition both domestically and globally. Under the framework of the intra-Afghan talks that took place, women negotiators raised women's rights issues throughout their formal and informal engagement with the Taliban. The parties on both sides of the peace table proposed an agenda in this regard, but the talks later stalled and eventually came to a halt following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Amid this context, the ACO found pathways to build bridges between the three main entities of the Republic peace architecture (the GoIRA negotiation team, the SMP, and the HCNR), which enabled women leaders to discuss clear objectives to be advanced in their respective roles within the architecture. Post 15 August 2021, UN Women continued to convene regular coordination meetings with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and hosted several rounds of consultations in the form of 'Virtual Policy Spaces' in the period following the Taliban takeover, in preparation for the WPS Open Debate Week in New York with Afghan women leaders and activists inside and outside the country. 'Virtual Policy Spaces' were held in the lead-up to the renewal of the mandate of the Monitoring and Sanctions Committee for Afghanistan in late 2021 and informed the Committee of opinions and recommendations on renewal, partial renewal, and full lifting of the international sanctions and the prospective consequences of each of these scenarios for women on the ground. UN Women, together with the UNAMA, held several joint (in-person and online) meetings with women leaders inside and outside Afghanistan focused on discussing the status of women's rights and recommending ways to address challenges. Central concerns raised during these engagements included (the maintenance/reinstatement of) women's access to work and income-generating activities; personal security; political persecution; the marked discrepancy between de facto authority messaging – especially that emanating from the leadership level – and the actions occurring on the ground (and the accompanying sense of unpredictability); and the role and engagement that the international community should have with the de facto authority.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_2.1

Women in Afghanistan have increased access to income generation opportunities and income security

Afghan women's access to income generation opportunities and income security was increased before August 2021 through the dual strategy of strengthening coordination between actors promoting decent employment and income generation; and through direct support extended to Afghan women entrepreneurs in the form of virtual mentorship, coaching, as well as seed financing. Through the establishment of the Economic Empowerment National Working Group as well as a National Dialogue on Financial inclusion, learning exchanges and dialogues between women's economic empowerment stakeholders were fostered, and the development of a roadmap to women's financial inclusion in Afghanistan was promoted. However, the Economic Empowerment National Working Group was chaired by the Ministry of Women Affairs, which was abolished by the Taliban, and the working group, therefore, suspended its meeting post-August-2021. Coming from various Afghan provinces, 21 young Afghan women entrepreneurs succeeded in strengthening their business and financial management skills through (virtual) mentorship, coaching, and exposure visits to neighbouring countries, and accessed seed capital to launch and expand their businesses. Furthermore, a nationwide call for proposals was opened in July 2021, aimed at reaching a new cohort of enthusiastic entrepreneurs, with more than 200 young women shortlisted for capacity-building training on business development as part of the scaled approach to facilitating more Afghan women entrepreneurs to move up key value chains. Following the Taliban's 2021 military campaign and ultimate seizure of control, which was accompanied by high levels of displacement across the country, this entrepreneurship initiative was placed

on hold pending the return of acceptable levels of stability. Emergency support in the form of cash-based interventions was subsequently provided to at-risk Afghan women in the Northern and Western parts of the country.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_6.1

The capacity of the government and stakeholders is strengthened to assess the progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and other global normative and policy frameworks

Before the seizure of state control by the Taliban in mid-August 2021, partnership on embedding systemic normative change on women's rights and empowerment in Afghanistan continued in earnest. Cooperation between UN Women and the Republic Government during this period included carrying out the review process for Afghan progress made towards adhering to key women's rights frameworks – such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, among others. UN Women was also able to leverage its coordination mandate to facilitate the functioning of platforms advocating for accountability on gender commitments, both within the UN system and with governmental actors. UN Women convened coordination meetings with the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Afghan Women's Network, all of which proved to be essential platforms for strategic engagement in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, under the de facto authority, the national-level gender equality architecture in Afghanistan has been dismantled, with the abolishment of the MoWA and the absence of any women in the Taliban's governing structure. In response, UN Women is strengthening its sub-office structure across five provinces, to bolster monitoring and reporting on women's rights developments at the provincial level and contribute to wider UN capacity to expand and hold the space carved out in the provinces on women's rights.

OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG_D_3.6

National and sub-national institutions and organisations have the commitment, knowledge and capacities to legislate, advocate, plan, implement and monitor policies to prevent and respond to SGBV and HP

Activities under this results area were paused while risk assessments and re-programming options were explored given the deterioration of the security situation in the lead-up to August 15th and the subsequent Taliban take-over of the country. A Concept Note for a "High-Level Religious Leaders' Forum on Islam and Ending Violence Against Women & Girls in Afghanistan" was developed and a briefing note on "Faith-based approaches to prevent violence against women and girls and create peaceful families, homes and communities" was developed for the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs to engage religious leaders in primary prevention efforts. These documents will be used to inform (adapted) programming approaches in 2022.