

# Progress in Afghanistan country in 2023

Data as of:  
 18 July 2024

## OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG\_D\_1.1

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan, particularly the most marginalized, can equitably access essential services that meet minimum quality standards.**

While UN Women has made some progress on the outcome, in 2023, women’s access to essential services in Afghanistan remained severely constrained by restrictions impacting service providers’ ability to operate on the one hand, and impacting women’s ability to freely seek and access services where they exist on the other hand. The de facto authorities (DFA) increasingly strengthened the monitoring of the implementation of various decrees issued to restrict women-led/women-focused organizations – who remain key providers of services for women, by women – , including through the creation of the de facto Grand Directorate for Monitoring and Implementation of Decrees and Orders. Simultaneously, Afghan women continued to experience restrictions on their freedom of movement. Afghanistan has faced long-standing challenges in providing widespread access to essential services, including health care, education, clean water, and sanitation, primarily due to ongoing conflicts, political instability, and economic difficulties. Against the backdrop of DFA restrictions, during 2023, progress on providing equitable access to essential services that meet the minimum quality standards – especially for Afghan women – was limited. In this context, UN Women Afghanistan and its partners were still able to successfully provide essential services for Afghan women where permitted, and advocated for spaces for the provision of services where they no longer existed. Assistance provided by UN agencies and local and international NGOs was critical to averting an even more devastating humanitarian and economic crisis from occurring in 2023. [1] UN Women and its partners have been consistent in monitoring restrictions and bans on women’s employment and participation in public life, and the impact which these have on women’s access to assistance, and their prospects for recovery. Through the provision of technical support and funding to civil society organization (CSO) partners, UN Women – in alignment with joint UN system approaches – continued to help women’s organizations navigate DFA restrictions, and the escalating infringements on women’s rights. UN Women further joined forces with other UN agencies and partners in the country, and engaged in strategic advocacy efforts with the DFA, to support CSO partners with the registration of their project interventions in support of women and girls. With UN Women support, in 2023, 9,368 individuals (8,587 women and girls, 781 men and boys) across Afghanistan received a range of violence against women and girls services through UN Women implemented projects; 24,564 women received information support through an interagency hotline operated with the support of UN Women and sister agencies; 6,170 women received emergency cash assistance; and 3,970 women who received multisectoral services at Multi-Purpose Women Centers (MPWCs) for internally displaced and crisis-affected women. For UN Women, the strategy for the achievement of this outcome incorporates an adaptive programming approach, that allows adjustments of programming interventions to contextual, often very localized developments. This strategy remained critical in 2023, whereby UN Women worked with partners to expand service delivery modalities beyond static service points (centers), to deliver services via businesses centers, community development centers, health facilities and established avenues, to support the most at-risk women (including women in drug treatment centers and female prisoners). This diversification of programming entry points for service provision, underpinned by UN Women’s advocacy and engagement – as part of UN Women’s overarching Country Programme in Afghanistan – , is deemed to remain key to address access barriers and operational challenges faced by women’s organizations, thus strengthening their ability to deliver for and with Afghan women and girls. [1] UNDP. Afghanistan: Socio-Economic Outlook . [2] United Nations Afghanistan. 2023. United Nations

**OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG\_D\_1.2**

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan will benefit from an increasingly stable, inclusive, and employment-rich economy, with greater equality of economic opportunities and more resilient livelihoods, increased food production, and improved natural resources management.**

While UN Women achieved some progress towards this Outcome, in 2023, economic decline continued to affect all sectors of the Afghan economy, though the decline has been slowed compared to 2022. Services, which made up 45 per cent of the national GDP, shrank by 6.5 per cent, following a sharp 30 per cent drop in 2022. The agriculture sector, which accounted for 36 per cent of GDP, declined by 6.6 per cent in 2023 due to unfavorable weather conditions and farmers' lack of resources to cope with the crises affecting their activities. The industrial sector also saw a contraction (of 5.7 per cent) in 2023, as businesses – especially those owned by women – faced closures due to limited access to resources and financial challenges. Analysts estimate that the "No-conflict" dividend in Afghanistan is spent: the economy still depends heavily on external support and lacks a self-sustaining pathway for recovery. [1]

Women's income security was drastically impacted by the fall of Kabul in August 2021, and women's livelihoods continue to be threatened by the impact of bans and decrees infringing on the rights of women and girls. Despite this economic decline, an increase in economic activity among women has been observed. Not surprisingly, given the reduced labour demand and constraints on women's economic activity imposed by the de facto authorities (DFA), the increase in economic activity among Afghan women has mostly occurred within the bounds of their homes. An increasing number of women are employed in the manufacturing sector, particularly in garment and food processing activities. In this context, UN Women is contributing to women's economic engagement, and utilizes the potential of women's economic empowerment to counterbalance the systemic exclusion of women and girls from all spheres of life in Afghanistan. For example, under a pilot initiative, UN Women worked with a private consulting firm to enhance access to employment opportunities for skilled women in Afghanistan. Pledges and expressions of interest to provide internship opportunities to Afghan women were secured from select companies, while others expressed willingness to contribute to discussions on women's economic participation. UN Women – together with other UN agencies – also supported current and aspiring women business owners and entrepreneurs, who are facing complex administrative and social barriers to develop, sustain and strengthen their businesses, and to access credit and markets. UN Women regularly meets with Afghan businesswomen in different parts of the country to learn about economic opportunities they would like to pursue, and to tailor support accordingly. UN Women also expanded partnership with other UN entities to create job opportunities for women within micro, small and medium enterprises through the "Roads to Decent Jobs" project implemented in partnership with ILO. Under this partnership, using a Market System Development (MSD) approach, women owned MSMEs are empowered not only to become self-sufficient but also to create jobs for women. UN Women's approach to economic empowerment will thereby continue to go beyond increasing women's income and is anchored in changing the social norms that govern a women's ability to influence decision making. UN Women will continue to use economic empowerment as a programming entry point in Afghanistan, contributing to ongoing work on countering the diminishing pathways for women's economic participation, and, by extension, on stimulating economic recovery. [1] Afghanistan-Development-Update-20231003-final.pdf

**OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG\_D\_1.3**

**By the end of 2025, more people in Afghanistan can participate in an increasingly**

**socially cohesive, gender equal, and inclusive society, where the rule of law and human rights are progressively upheld, and more people can fully, equally, and safely participate in governance and decision-making.**

During 2023, in a context where the de facto authorities (DFA) continued to enforce and promulgate restrictions on women's rights to work, education, and freedom of movement, progress against this outcome remained limited. UN Women Afghanistan continued its efforts to ensure that more women and girls in Afghanistan can participate in an increasingly socially cohesive, equal and inclusive society, through promoting gender as a central focus of the humanitarian response and increasing the participation and voice of women in decision-making. On the Humanitarian front: UN Women and its partners monitored the effects of the December 2022 ban on Afghan women working for I/NGOs and provided substantive gender analysis to inform programme design, contributing to the evidence base for aid agencies to recognize the centrality of gender and protection in the protracted crisis occurring on the ground. By the end of 2023, the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan emphasized the need to address gender issues in all aspects of the humanitarian response. The ACO also promoted the participation of women and women's CSOs at all stages of the project planning process, particularly through the Women's Advisory Group to the Humanitarian Country team (HCT in Afghanistan). They played a crucial role in advancing gender equality, promoting social cohesion, and upholding human rights during 2023, ultimately contributing to advancing the progress on this outcome. [1] On advancing Women, Peace and Security Agenda: UN Women contributed to creating spaces for Afghan women to safely participate in international governance and decision-making. Specific results achieved in 2023 include: Contribution to securing strong language around women's participation in Resolution 2721, passed by the Security Council to act upon the recommendations of the Independent Assessment on Afghanistan. Language was secured around the full, equal, and safe participation of Afghan women in any current or future engagement formats or intra-Afghan dialogue processes. The pathways to women's participation are embedded in UN Women's quarterly consultation cycle and the ability to create spaces for Afghan women to brief the international community. Amplification of the voices of diverse Afghan women inside the country through the creation of a meaningful consultation cycle, in collaboration with IOM and UNAMA, to ensure that their priorities and policy recommendations influence international decision-making vis-à-vis Afghanistan, establishing a foundation for operationalization of the participation pillar of the WPS agenda. Shaped international norms through convening an Expert Group Meeting on international strategies and tools that offered insights on how the international community can better respond, through the creation of new tools ('gender apartheid') and enhanced use of existing tools, to an unprecedented women's rights crisis. Supported 13 Afghan women-led/gender-focused organizations to advance women's rights at the national and sub-national levels through activities related to building social cohesion in communities, documenting the status of women and girls in Afghanistan, providing protection services to women human rights defenders, coalition-building among Afghan women and strengthening the organizational capacity of grassroots women-led CSOs. Created an enabling environment for women's leadership through investing in protection services for WHRDs under threat, in a context where all protection infrastructure has been abolished. On Strengthened institutional and organizational resilience of partners, including rebuilding and strengthening women's organizations and the women's movement. ACO modalities deployed in this pursuit included: Partnering with 86 WCSOs (US\$1.785m funded). Contracting 36 women's organizations, via the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) (grants of up to \$200k). Partnering with 35 organizations and businesses in four thematic portfolios (Programme Thematic Funding). Capacity-building and technical support to ensure that women-led CSOs have the necessary support and funding in a complex and constrained operational environment and that they could continue to operate and strengthen their capacity for longer-term sustainability. On Communication and Advocacy Fronts: UN Women continued its strong focus on delivering robust communications outputs in support of its mandate in Afghanistan. Among endeavours toward this end undertaken over the course of 2023 stand several actions aimed at achieving an Afghanistan that is more cohesive, equitable and stable, and which serves the prevailing needs of its citizens: Mission to Faizabad : In collaboration with UNHCR and FAO, the ACO conducted a field visit to Faizabad, Badakhshan

province, where a women's market is to be established. The UN Women Deputy Country Representative joined the mission to show solidarity with Afghan women, listen to their challenges and explore ways in which UN Women can support them. High-Level Mission : In January 2023, at the request of the UN Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, and Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Political, Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, Khaled Khiari undertook a four-day visit to Afghanistan to appraise the situation in country, engage with the DFA, and underscore UN solidarity with the Afghan people. Relevant statements can be found here and here . Gender analysis publications: Thought leadership and consolidation of UN Women as the 'go-to' actor for analysis on women's rights in Afghanistan. Key outputs in this regard: Gender Alerts on Afghan women working in NGOs and women's rights under the Taliban . Rapid-response Gender Updates on the Herat earthquakes ( 10 and 21 October) and Afghan returnees ( 14 November and 10 December ). 7 Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Snapshots on the impacts of the bans on Afghan women workers. Expert Group Meeting gathering Afghan women and international legal and political experts to reflect upon and build understanding around 'gender apartheid', and the legal and political implications of using this term in the Afghan context. Consultations with IOM and UNAMA on Afghan women's perspectives, to inform policy, programming and decision-making (see the summary reports for Q1 , Q2 , Q3 , Q4 ). The inter-agency Afghanistan Rapid Gender Analysis [1] , produced via the GiHA Working Group, with the GenCap entity. The document provides a snapshot, as of September 2023, of the prevailing situation for women, men, girls, and boys in Afghanistan, in an effort to increase understanding of the gendered impact of the humanitarian crisis. A flyer on the situation following the series of major earthquakes that struck Herat province in October 2023 (also published via the UN Women Asia-Pacific website): Infographic: UN Women's Response to Herat Earthquake [1] GiHA. Afghanistan Rapid Gender Analysis 2023 . [1] OCHA. 2023. Humanitarian Response Plan: Afghanistan . Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. March 2023.

#### OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-AFG\_D\_1.4

### **The UN system in Afghanistan, Member States and regional organizations effectively contribute to progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan**

Applicable for reporting from 2024. For 2023, relevant achievement on UN Coordination is captured under Outcome 1.3, Output 1.3.1 specifically.