

newsletter

Issue 1 | COVID-19 Special Edition • July 2020



CRISIS & OPPORTUNITY

On Afghan women's issues by
Afghan women experts

GENDER ALERTS

Critical research where
there was none

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In solidarity with the
Afghan women's rights
movement

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COVID-19 Special Edition

We are launching our first newsletter at one of the most difficult times in modern history. COVID-19 continues to spread across Afghanistan, and the globe. This is not just a health crisis. It shocks our societies and economies. It threatens our future, and it exposes how unequal we really are. Yet for us at UN Women Afghanistan, COVID-19 has also confirmed one of our strong beliefs— that we are relevant as long as we serve the communities we are meant to serve, as long as we are there where Afghan women need us to be. Lockdown and travel restrictions prevented us from being in physical proximity, but it did not prevent us from being connected more than ever. Looking back at the last three months, we have come a long way. We provided personal protective equipment to women seeking shelter from abuse at home, released COVID 19 protocols for Women Protection Centres and Family Guidance Centres to ensure they can continue to provide critical services safely, and launched a COVID 19 call for ideas, offering grants of up to \$2,000 for community-led initiatives that support women and girls across Afghanistan. We released a series of gender alerts that highlight the gender specific impacts of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, from the lack of services for survivors of violence to the challenges of building peace during a health crisis and a fast-paced rise in the burden of unpaid care work. We talked with Afghan and international experts about the pains and gains that Afghan women have experienced over the last two decades, we engaged daily with the women we serve, hosting daily calls with activists and partners across Afghanistan to hear directly from them on how COVID 19 is impacting on their lives and their constituencies and launched COVID 19 information campaigns. This is in addition to our ongoing normative, coordination and programming work to serve the women and girls of Afghanistan. Our journey continues and we will not give up -- on gender equality, on women's rights, on Afghanistan.

In solidarity,

Aleta Miller
UN Women Representative in Afghanistan





Some of the Crisis and Opportunity panelists

"Crisis and opportunity" was a series of digital conversations on Afghan women and COVID-19 convened by UN Women Afghanistan in partnership with women's rights networks, activists, frontline responders, humanitarian workers, women entrepreneurs, policymakers and the general public to explore, understand and debate how COVID-19 is impacting women in Afghanistan and how we can effectively respond. Four digital events were held as part of the series covering topics such as women in humanitarian action, ending violence against women and girls, women and the peace process and women's human rights. All panels had prominent Afghan women leaders and experts as key speakers including H.E Hasina Safi - Minister of Women's Affairs, Dr Habina Sarabi - a member of the Government's Peace Negotiation Team, Dr Orzala Nemat - Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Deborah Lyons - the UN's top envoy in Afghanistan and Lyse Doucet - BBC Chief International Correspondent. **Over 700 people attended the panels, making the Crisis and Opportunity panels series the only platform in Afghanistan where Afghan women experts debated Afghan women's challenges in times of COVID-19 at this scale.**

[Check here to read about the key points raised during the Crisis and Opportunity panel series](#)

On Afghan women's issues by Afghan women experts - THE CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY PANELS



To be in contact with women’s rights activists and communities on the ground, Aleta Miller -UN Women Country Representative in Afghanistan has been engaging in daily virtual calls on ZOOM with Afghan women leaders over the past 3 months. The aim of these calls is to hear from various Afghan women active in civil society, business, government, and the security sector on their priorities and needs in the COVID-19 context and to build solidarity during this period. One of the calls was with the newly appointed Minister of Women’s Affairs - H.E. Hasina Safi. This was Minister Safi’s first call/ meeting with a representative of the international community in Afghanistan in her new role. The calls also serve as a tool for adjusting programmatic priorities to suit the needs of the communities the Country Office serves, and are attended by programme experts from various teams including political participation and ending violence against women and girls. As a result of the feedback received during the calls, UN Women launched a community-driven small grants scheme to assist women’s rights organizations but also women-led businesses to run COVID-19 related activities in their communities. Over 200 entities from across Afghanistan applied to the call. Key points from the daily calls are also shared on UN Women Afghanistan social media channels and our digital community.

In solidarity with the Afghan women’s rights movement

ACTIVISTS ENGAGEMENT



Critical research where there was none

COVID-19 GENDER ALERTS:

[Issue 1: Humanitarian Response](#)

[Issue 2: Services for Survivors of Violence](#)

[Issue 3: Women, Peace and Security](#)

[Issue 4: Burden of Care and Unpaid Domestic Labor](#)

[Issue 5: Maintaining services for Survivors of Violence](#)

[Issue 6: Participation in the Afghan Peace Process](#)

[Issue 7: Leadership in the COVID-19 Response](#)

[Issue 8: Women IDPs](#)

[Issue 9: Access to health](#)

[Issue 10: Women with disabilities](#)

[Issue 11: Women's Economic Empowerment](#)

[Issue 12: Opium Poppy Cultivation](#)

[Issue 13: Girls, Adolescent Girls and Young Women](#)

The Gender Alerts series highlights the disproportionate gender specific impacts of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, from the lack of services for survivors of violence to the challenges of building peace during a health crisis and a fast-paced rise in the burden of unpaid care work. The Gender Alerts which came out each week, were initiated to respond to the lack of information, research and guidance on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in Afghanistan and gender-responsive approaches. Each Alert provides recommendations for national and international stakeholders on how to more effectively integrate gender into COVID-19 responses. Our Gender Alerts series builds on global literature and data, contextualized to the Afghanistan context, as well as information coming from consultations with our partners, including government, UN and civil society organisations. With the gender alerts, we are putting a spotlight on the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups, elevating the voices of our civil society partners and promoting a feminist response to COVID-19 in Afghanistan. The Gender Alerts series has been recognized as a global best practice.



Women-centred information campaigns

SALAM FOR SAFETY

While women are at the forefront of most crises, they are rarely in the spotlight of public awareness campaigns. When they are part of campaigns, women are predominantly portrayed as performing household or care related chores. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women Afghanistan launched “Salam for Safety” - a COVID-19 public information campaign featuring women as central figures and encouraging Afghan women and men to use the traditional Afghan “Salam” greeting, practice social distancing and wear masks as prevention measures to stop the virus from spreading further. The campaign was initially launched online. Over the span of 4 months, the campaign expanded. Posters, badges and stickers are being distributed across Afghanistan by UN Women in partnership with WFP, IOM, UNHCR, NRC and IRC to over 12.000 people and communities. “Salam for Safety” served as the inspiration and starting point for a regional campaign run by UN Women’s Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific called “Greet like me”. The campaign uses social media messages and illustrations inspired by traditional greetings used in various countries across the region to encourage people to practice social distancing while embracing their local traditions.

SHARE THE CARE

Women’s burden of care is a significant issue in Afghanistan, which has been exacerbated with COVID-19. ACO launched the results of a time-use survey commissioned by UN Women, to inform a campaign, “Share the Care” (launched in May), that encourages women and men to share the burden of caregiving within households and to influence social norms around women’s caregiving roles. The campaign consisted of short stories, curated by UN Women Afghanistan communications team, on how Afghan women and men share the burden of care at home. The campaign featured well-known Afghan women like Sahra Karimi - an Afghan film director and the first female chairperson of the Afghan Film Organisation, young women activists, but also regular women and men across the country. The campaign included the option for UN Women’s digital followers to share their own stories on how they “share the care” through their social media channels. A selected number of these stories collected from the audience were curated and disseminated on UN Women’s Afghanistan social media channels. The campaign highlighted positive practices in sharing of household chores between Afghan women and men during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Maintaining Services for Survivors of Violence against Women and Girls during COVID-19 in Afghanistan

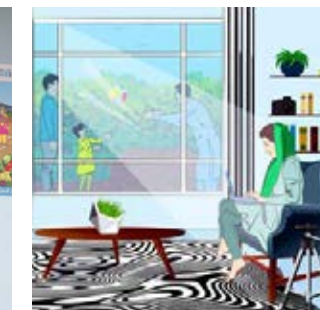
We know that for far too many Afghan women, what should be the safest place - the home - is the most dangerous. Before the pandemic, approximately 87% of Afghan women experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence in the past year. And this was before COVID-19. With movement restricted, schools closed, people confined, and poverty and unemployment increasing, women and girls are at greater risk of violence. An Oxfam survey in Afghanistan reported that 97% of female respondents had experienced an increase in gender-based violence since the beginning of the outbreak[1]. Confinement is fostering tensions created by security, health, and money worries. And it is increasing isolation for women with violent partners, separating them from the people and resources that can best help them. In parallel, as health systems are stretching to breaking point, domestic violence shelters are also reaching capacity. There has never been a time when women and girl survivors of violence have needed services more. And yet, funding gaps that existed before the pandemic are even wider now, with resources diverted to respond to the health crisis. Across Afghanistan, in partnership with the government and civil society, UN Women Afghanistan runs shelters where women survivors can find refuge from abusers, receive medical and legal assistance and learn skills that can enable them to become economically independent. Annually, nearly 4000 women survivors and their children receive life-saving services from these centres supported by UN Women. With COVID-19 resulting in a rise in domestic violence cases, UN Women in Afghanistan with partners launched COVID-19 guidelines to ensure the provision of life-saving services for women and girl survivors can continue in a safe manner. The guidelines were rolled out in a series of orientation sessions for the staff of 11 Women Protection Centers and 5 Family Guidance Centers across 9 provinces. In addition, UN Women distributed personal protective equipment to all these frontline service providers.

[1] Oxfam (2020). A New Scourge to Afghan Women: COVID-19

[Check here the Guidance Note for Women Protection Centers operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Check here the Guidance Note for Family Protection Centers, Family Guidance Centers and Women and Girl Safe Spaces operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)





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