



BRIEF NO. 1: MEDIA RESTRICTIONS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN AFGHANISTAN

UN WOMEN THEMATIC BRIEFING SERIES



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ABOUT THE THEMATIC BRIEFING SERIES

UN Women is generating a Thematic Briefing Series to analyse the gender dynamics of pressing themes facing Afghanistan. These briefings weave subnational and regional elements into thematic concerns – including media restrictions, legal and justice system changes, and profile gender equality and women’s rights issues. The Thematic Briefing Series aims to provide United Nations (UN) personnel, officials from other multilateral institutions, donor representatives, and international non-governmental organization (INGO) counterparts with rigorous gender-sensitive analysis and suggestions for action.

Key topics of the Thematic Briefing No. 1 (2022)

- Restrictions on media freedom.
- Safety and security of media workers.
- Violation of the rights of women journalists to work and express themselves.
- Media independence.



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SUMMARY

- After nearly 20 years of international investment and successful efforts to build a diverse media landscape and strengthen journalism standards, **the Afghan media sector has fundamentally changed** for the worse since the Taliban (also referred herein to as the de facto authorities) takeover on 15 August 2021.
- Before mid-August 2021, dedicated **initiatives and investment** focused on increasing the number of women working in the media across a diversity of roles, training and equipping them with valuable skills and expertise, as well as a substantive focus on women's rights and gender equality in the media content, including on how gender inequality is a driver of conflict.
- **The Taliban has sought to bring the Afghan media under its control**, prohibiting broadcasts and publications that criticize Taliban rule and/or are incompatible with the group's interpretation of Islamic and Afghan values.
- There is no universal experience across the changed media environment as the level of **subnational variation** is notable. The position of individual de facto leaders on media freedom varies according to their personal viewpoints and relationship to the media in the past, and their perception of the value of media to extend the credibility and authority of the Taliban in the eyes of the target audience.
- Despite subnational variations, **nationwide trends are becoming increasingly discernible, clear and solidified**. Although in some cases the level of discretion may be higher, rules and practices are consistent and congruent – continuous harassment, attacks, and detention of journalists, the requirement for women journalists to cover their face when on air, and various tactics which combined lead to self-censorship

and exclusion of women from the media. This indicates a systematic and coherent effort to muzzle the media and exclude women – their faces, perspectives, and experiences – from public spaces.

- Afghans across the country have grown to rely on **television, radio, and other forms of media** for information on a wide range of concerns. For some Afghans, including those now outside the country, social media – especially Facebook – has become an alternative media platform. However, without reliable, diverse, and independent media, all Afghans are denied access to information and plurality of opinions and ideas.

Methodology

This Thematic Briefing draws on a comprehensive desk review of available secondary data and analysis, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with Afghans in and outside of the country, as well as with international actors. Analysis and data sources from the 2021 Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis prepared for the UN Country Team are also utilized.

Each Briefing is peer reviewed by a mixture of Afghan and international experts on both the topic at hand and gender equality more broadly. For security reasons, individuals involved in primary data collection – interviews and focus group discussions – are not named. This Thematic Briefing primarily covers updates from 15 August 2021 up to end of July 2022.

1 RSF (Reporters Without Borders). 2022. "[Act quickly to protect Afghan journalists, RSF tells new UN special rapporteur.](#)"

1 MEDIA FREEDOM IN AFGHANISTAN FROM 2001 TO 2021

Media freedom in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021

After 2001, press freedom and media flourished in Afghanistan.² There was a proliferation of television, radio, online platforms and print media outlets, with extensive international investment from the private sector and via official development assistance.³ **In 2020, there were over 33 television stations and 35 radio stations, and more than 300 press publications.**⁴ The rate of household television ownership grew significantly over this 20-year period: in 2018, 69 per cent of Afghans cited television as their main source of information, followed by radio (63 per cent).⁵

There was also **increased access to the internet**, reported at 23 per cent in January 2022,⁶ having grown from 16.8 per cent in 2019, 11.6 per cent in 2017, and 3.3 per cent in 2013.⁷ **Women and men had differential access to social media and technological devices.** A 2012 study showed that 32 per cent of women's access to mobile phones was through use of a family member's device (usually a male relative); the research cited conservative social norms as the main barrier to women's independent ownership.⁸

Gender disaggregated data released in January 2022 indicated that these differences continued in the **social media age**. Facebook and Instagram cited an average advertising audience in Afghanistan of 18.2 per cent female and 81.7 per cent male; in January 2021, Twitter placed its advertising audience at 4.2 per cent female and 95.8 per cent male.⁹ The pattern of women's lower access to devices and social media use thus pre-dates August 2021, demonstrating deep societal norms that underpin gender inequality across the country.

Women's involvement in media expanded from 2001 until the Taliban takeover, as media owners, journalists, editors, broadcasters, content creators and producers.¹⁰ Women were visible at different levels of the media sector. Afghan women journalists received numerous national and international awards in recognition of their outstanding contributions to journalism.¹¹ Many women also became avid media consumers (though not in the same numbers as men) with content – news, entertainment and advertising – geared toward this demographic. There were also efforts directed towards improving the quality of reporting on women's rights and gender equality, contributing to visibility

- 2 Cary, P. 2012. An explosion of news: The state of media in Afghanistan. Center for International Media Assistance, National Endowment for Democracy. Washington D.C.: NED; Deane, J. and S. Siddiqi. 2016. "Role of the Media in Nation Forming." In [State Strengthening in Afghanistan: Lesson learned 2001-2014](#). Smith, S. and C. Cookman (Eds.). USIP. Peaceworks. 125-132. Washington D.C.: USIP; Isaczai, N.R. 2014. Role of media in fostering democracy in Afghanistan 2001- 2013. Leicester: University of Leicester.
- 3 AREU (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit). 2020. [The A-to-Z Guide](#); Deane, J. and S. Siddiqi. 2016. "Role of the Media."
- 4 AREU. 2020. [The A-to-Z Guide](#).
- 5 The Asia Foundation. 2018. [A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan 2018](#).
- 6 Kemp. S. 2022. [Digital 2022: Afghanistan](#). DataReportal, 15 February 2022.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 USAID (United States Agency for International Development). 2013. [Connecting to Opportunity: A Survey of Afghan Women's Access to Mobile Technology](#). May 2013. Washington D.C.: USAID.

- 9 These figures should be understood to provide an indication of the disparity between men and women. Audience advertising data does not give a fully accurate representation of individual accounts, nor of male and female users (particularly in a context where women users often make anonymous, albeit gender-specific, accounts): Kemp. S. 2022. [Digital 2022: Afghanistan](#).
- 10 Mojumdar, A. 2011. "From Both Sides of the Mic: Women and the Media." In *Land of the Unconquerable*. Heath, J. and A. Zahedi (Eds.), pp. 321-332.
- 11 AJC (Afghanistan Journalists Centre). 2014. ["Danish Karokhel and Najiba Ayubi among 100 information heroes."](#) News, Kabul, 30 April 2014; AJC. 2013. ["Najiba Ayubi has been honored with Courage in Journalism Awards."](#) News, World Awards. 4 May 2013; TOLONews. 2021. ["Anisa Shaheed Wins Best Journalist of the Year Award."](#) Afghanistan, 17 April 2021.

and societal shifts in attitudes around these issues. During this time, the democratically elected Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) created and **institutionalized mechanisms for media protection and safety**, including numerous laws to provide for stronger protections for media freedom and facilitate journalists' access to information from government entities.¹² Various commissions were established, including the governmental Media Violations Investigation Commission which dealt with complaints against journalists. Some considered this Commission a flawed mechanism, noting the presence of anti-media bias.¹³ Advocacy by media support groups in Afghanistan and abroad pushed the GoIRA to create the **Joint Committee for Safety and Security of Journalists** in 2016, with representation from both government and media, to address security concerns and threats to the safety of journalists.¹⁴ Despite flaws in systems established to protect these professionals, journalists could nonetheless criticize political developments and undertake investigations. The media was considered an important part of the wider democratic process.

While the media landscape undoubtedly transformed during this two-decade period, journalism remained a risky business. Afghanistan has long been considered one of the deadliest countries for journalists, with **93 recorded deaths of journalists since 2001**.¹⁵ The 2021 World Press Freedom Index ranked Afghanistan 122nd out of 180 countries.¹⁶ A September 2021 survey by the Association of Women in Radio and Television – Afghanistan Chapter found that 100 per cent of respondents (353 male and female journalists) felt that their job caused security concerns.¹⁷ Indeed, in the months following the start of the Afghanistan peace negotiations on 12 September 2020, 11 journalists and human rights defenders were killed.¹⁸ **Women journalists were frequently and specifically targeted** not only for the issues they covered but also for challenging social norms that inhibit women from fully participating in public life, interacting with men outside their family, or working outside the home.¹⁹ Despite facing enormous risks and targeted attacks, many women journalists, both established and aspiring, continued to pursue their path in this field.²⁰

12 Mass Media Law 2006; Mass Media Law 2009; Access to Information Law 2014. The de facto authorities confirmed in February 2022 that the Mass Media Law remains enforceable: AJSC (Afghan Journalists Safety Committee). 2022. [“Mass Media Law of Afghanistan is Still Enforceable.”](#) 2 February 2022.

13 HRW (Human Rights Watch). 2015. [“Stop Reporting or We’ll Kill Your Family”: Threats to Media Freedom in Afghanistan.”](#) 21 January 2015.

14 Alami, I., Tanai, N., and M. Mobarez. 2019. [Supporting safety of journalists in Afghanistan: an assessment based on UNESCO’s Journalists’ Safety Indicators](#). UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

15 IFJ (International Federation of Journalists). 2022. [“Asia Pacific tops IFJ’s Killed List as deadliest region for journalists.”](#) Press Releases, 10 February 2022; UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan). 2021. [Special Report: Killing of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021. February 2021.](#)

16 RSF. 2021. [World Press Freedom Index 2021.](#)

17 Association of Women in Radio and Television (Afghanistan Chapter). September 2021. Personal security (safety), problems in the working environment and issues encountered with reporting autonomy of women journalists in ‘Afghanistan’.

18 UNAMA. 2022. [Human Rights in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021 – 15 June 2022. July 2022.](#)

19 HRW. 2021. [“Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists, Women in Media.”](#) News, 1 April 2021.

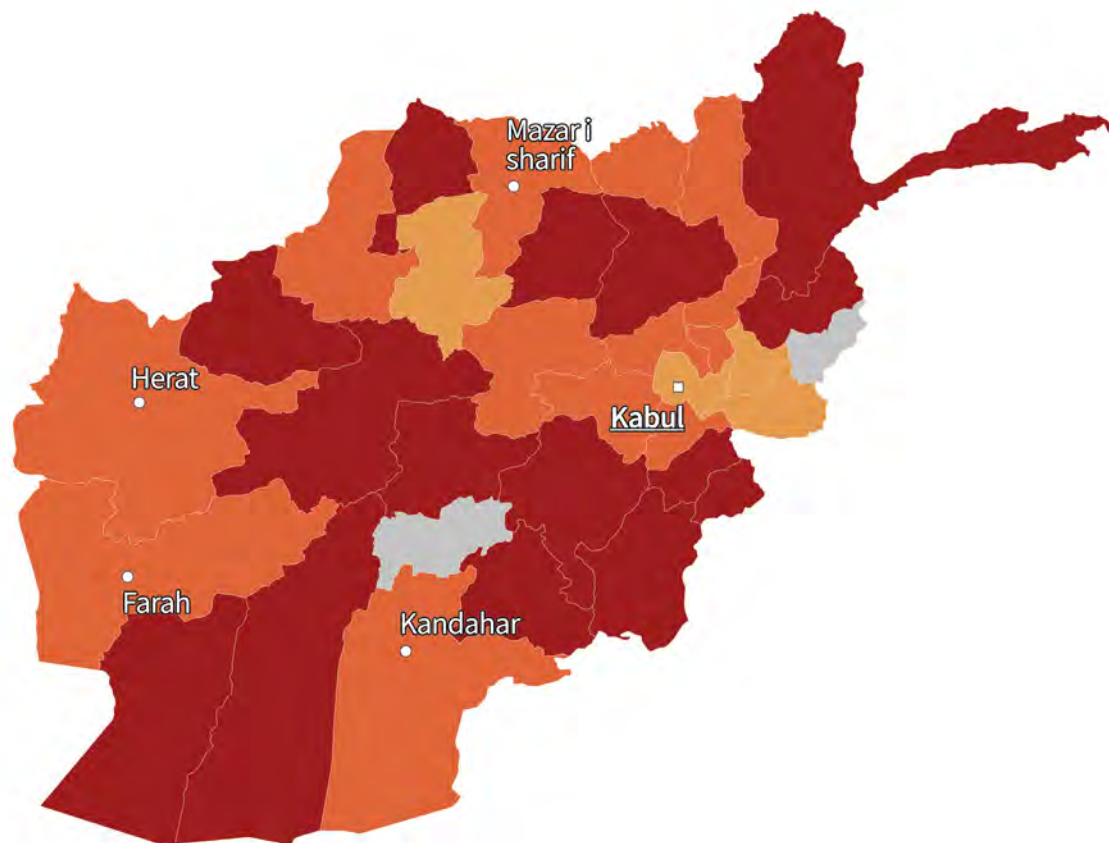
20 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 4 April 2021.

All women journalists lost their job in 11 provinces of Afghanistan

Proportion of women journalists or media collaborators in each province who have lost their jobs since the Taliban takeover (15/08/2021)

You can find the graphic here to download: <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-has-lost-almost-60-its-journalists-fall-kabul>

0 % 1-24 % 25-49 % 50-74 % 75-99 % 100 %



Data compiled on 08/12/2021.

Source: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) • Created with Datawrapper

2

SHIFTS IN MEDIA
SINCE 2021

Shifts since August 2021

The takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban resulted in equally **swift changes to the media sector**. Rules, statements and actions on a variety of areas have been ad hoc and discrete, coming from different sources inside the de facto authorities, and implemented to differing degrees across the country. Yet, as time goes on, it becomes apparent that a coherent, institutionalized, and systematic effort is underway to remove media freedoms and exclude women – their faces, perspectives, and needs – from public space.

Censorship – including self-censorship – has abolished objective, independent journalism. **Restricted access to information and entertainment may ultimately reverse gains** made during the past two decades to shift away from harmful social norms, including regressive gender values and practices. The **continued harassment, attack, and detention of journalists** shows an approach to the media that emphasizes control.²¹ This approach to the media – and the restrictions against women that directly and indirectly affect the media – risks ensuring increasing intolerance and hostility within Afghan society. Reflecting the deteriorating situation in country, Afghanistan was ranked 156th of 180 countries in the 2022 edition of the Press Freedom Index.²² A chilling effect is observed across media outlets, national and local, which is serving to consolidate male dominance over the media sector as companies are increasingly unwilling to employ women staff.²³

21 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

22 RSF. 2022 World Press Freedom Index 2022.

23 Comment made during focus group discussion on 21 June 2022.

The perilous state of the media has been further compounded by the mass exodus of journalists during the lead-up to full international troop withdrawal at the end of August 2021.

Censorship and self-censorship

Since 20 September 2021, **the de facto authorities have issued three core sets of rules for the media**, outlining a variety of prohibitions and requirements. These rules omit any mention of the rights of the media, freedom of expression or freedom of information.²⁴ The restrictions have come from different sources within the de facto authorities – the de facto Media Information Centre, the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), and the de facto Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The rules that have been announced are accompanied by unwritten rules and enforced by means of intimidation, torture, arrest, and direct and indirect harassment from the intelligence services.²⁵ While these overlapping sources of regulation indicate a lack of centralization and soft competition between different institutions, there is an overall pattern of de facto authority restrictions that have diminished the media landscape. In other words, while variations exist as to perspective and interpretation within the de facto authorities on the rules governing the media, the end result is **a significant and rapid loss of media independence**.

24 Qaane, E. 2022. [Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What has happened to the Afghan media?](#). Afghanistan Analysts Network. Rights and Freedoms, 7 March 2022.

25 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022; Rahmani, W. and S. Butler. 2022. [Afghanistan's intelligence agency emerges as new threat to independent media](#). CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). 2 March 2022.

The **first and second sets of rules** issued by the de facto authorities on **20 and 25 September 2021** (respectively) prohibit the media from broadcasting **programmes and publications deemed as being against Islam** (as interpreted by the Taliban), or considered **insulting to national personalities**. These sets of rules also order journalists to **avoid broadcasting or publishing unconfirmed information**. Journalists in some areas **must have their content approved** (or 'confirmed') prior to transmission. The de facto Information and Culture Directorate (ICD), the provincial branches of the de facto MoIC, has effective control over media programmes and journalists. However, the level of control projected is not consistent nationally, with the degree of pre-approval required for producing, broadcasting, and publishing a report varying from one province to the next.

The **third set of rules, issued on 21 November 2021**, prohibits broadcasting drama and entertainment that **violate Islamic and Afghan cultural values and norms** (as interpreted by the Taliban). This rule has reportedly been strictly imposed on broadcasts in Balkh and Takhar provinces. Reports also show that **women's faces and voices have been banned** in all media in Takhar.²⁶ Radio stations have been obliged in some provinces to **replace news and music programming with content of a religious nature**, leading some local radio stations to ultimately cease broadcasting altogether.²⁷ As of mid-July 2022, there have been no rules banning male faces or voices from media, demonstrating the gendered nature of rules announced by the de facto authorities.

26 AJSC (Afghan Journalists Safety Committee). 2021. ["Afghanistan Media at a Glance \(Second week – December 2021\)."](#)

27 RSF. 2021. ["Since the Taliban takeover, 40% of Afghan media have closed, 80% of women journalists have lost their jobs."](#) News, 20 December 2021.

With an absence of a clear legal or administrative structure underpinning policy in this area, these guidelines issued by the de facto authorities for the media have been **adopted and enforced differently across provinces and districts of Afghanistan**.²⁸ This variation is partly due to the responses of media outlet owners, the level of implementation insisted upon by the local de facto authorities, and often, the relationship between these two elements. Evidence suggests that contacts and personal relationships dictate how guidelines are implemented, showing that **some negotiation is possible** for those in the media sector.²⁹

Examples of this dynamic can be seen in the uniform implementation of some rules across the country and the more ad hoc approaches to other rules. In the former category stands the requirement for the media to **refer to the de facto authorities as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'**, rather than the Taliban. In the latter category stands orders aimed at other areas, such as the requirement to have **media broadcast content approved by the de facto ICD** prior to publication, which has not been enforced in certain parts of the country. In Mazar-e Sharif, for example, the central authorities did not push governors to adopt the guidelines on this, reportedly for fear of fracturing the Taliban movement.³⁰

28 Khalid, S. 2022. ["Taliban Severely Restrict Media in Central Afghanistan."](#) Hasht e Subh, 22 January 2022.

29 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

30 Various interviews with Afghan media figures and an Afghan women's rights activist, 6-10 May 2022.

These examples reveal how political dynamics within the Taliban play out in the everyday implementation of decrees and regulations. Although anecdotal and set within a context lacking in clarity or consistency across policy and implementation, such examples would seem to carry worrying implications for the overall national picture. One can see, for example, how an easing of central restrictions may not necessarily mean that local representatives of the de facto authorities automatically follow suit in their area. The **blurred picture on which rules are enforced** on the ground ultimately creates ambiguity and a fertile environment for self-censorship – a particularly serious concern for women in the media sector, who also have to navigate a broader set of rules governing their movement and right to work. These types of concerns for women risk contributing to a drop in those willing to continue working (or allowed to by relatives), leading to a subtle erasure of diverse voices in the media sector.

In spite of the ad hoc and varied implementation across the country, the present guidelines and censorship provide a coherent framework for the persecution of journalists. Women are particularly targeted because of rules that hinder their independent mobility and full right to work. Combined with the repercussions for transgressing the guidelines, they result in **countrywide self-censorship and a massive decline in content quality and diversity**. Discrete and vague rules (for example, noting 'Islamic and Afghan cultural values and norms') are interpreted – consolidated and reinforced – through nationwide regulations, such as the 21 May 2022 order requiring women journalists to cover their face when on air. The order requiring women to cover their faces while on television contributes to erasing women from public life.

Diminished media landscape

The media landscape has shrunk dramatically since the Taliban takeover. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and its Afghan partner, the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), carried out **a survey in July 2022** which found that out of the 547 media outlets in operation on the eve of the Taliban takeover, **219 - or 40% - had, by the time of the survey, closed**.³¹ The constraints faced by media outlets also goes beyond censorship and violence against media workers. **Revenue has dropped by an estimated 50-70 per cent**, from US\$ 50-100 million to US\$ 10-15 million.³² Previously, media outlets were heavily reliant on foreign grants and advertising, which have largely stopped since 15 August 2021 – unless directly related to life-saving humanitarian assistance.³³ The financial impact of the ban on music and drama programmes has been felt as viewer numbers, and consequently advertising interest, has reduced. The withdrawal of foreign aid, combined with the economic impact of the sanctions and freezing of Afghanistan's foreign reserves has further contributed to the closure of many media outlets.³⁴ A cash-strapped media sector is a key contributor to the overall decline in the media landscape.

31 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#)

32 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

33 Bjelica, J. 2016. [“No Microphone for the President”: Can Radio Television Afghanistan still become a public service broadcaster?](#). Afghanistan Analysts Network. Culture and Context, 1 May 2016; Qaane, E. 2022. [Regime change, economic decline and no legal protection: What has happened to the Afghan media?](#) Rights and Freedoms, 7 March 2022.

34 Qaane, E. 2022. [Regime change](#).

Media workers have left the country (most of them during the two-week lead-up to foreign troop withdrawal), lost their jobs, or stopped working because of harassment, violence, threats, and censorship. Of the **11,857 people working in the media (9,101 men and 2,756 women) at the start of August 2021, only 4,759 (4,103 men and 656 women) were still working by July 2022.**³⁵

According to RSF data in 2022, women journalists have been impacted more than their male counterparts: **76.19% of women journalists are no longer working** in Afghanistan and **women journalists are not working in 11 provinces** (Badghis, Helmand, Daikundi, Ghazni, Wardak, Nimroz, Nuristan, Paktika, Paktia, Samangan and Zabul). Of the **656 women journalists who continue working, 84.6% are based in the Kabul region.**³⁶ This was a reduction of 84 percent for female journalists and 52 percent for male journalists.³⁷ The difference in this data demonstrates that broader restrictions on women's rights – requiring a mahram when travelling, the ordering of women Afghan TV presenters and other women appearing on screen to cover their faces when on air – serves to double the impact felt by women journalists.

35 RSF. 2022. [“Act quickly to protect Afghan journalists, RSF tells new UN special rapporteur.”](#) 13 April 2022.

36 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”.](#)

37 Ibid.

Women journalists are forced to face multiple compounding restrictions, and navigate the additional **subtle, regressive shift in societal understandings of and perspectives on gender norms.** As one women journalist noted, “It is a suffocating environment for women journalists.”³⁸ Media outlets are also reportedly showing bias in retaining men over women in journalism roles out of fear of repercussions on non-compliance with broader restrictions on women's rights. The pressure of a massive economic upheaval where many businesses are struggling to survive also narrows openness to retaining women staff in media outlets as the risk of being shut down – and the associated economic loss – likely outweighs the risk of keeping women in the newsrooms.

The overall result is a chilling effect. The indirect ramifications of dismissing women staff in the media sector removes them from public space, contributing to the retreat of women into domestic environments. The justification underpinning this retreat is often that of protecting women, which normalizes the narrative that women are *inherently* vulnerable and require protection, erasing their agency and vital contribution to a pluralistic society.

38 Comment made during focus group discussion on 26 June 2022.

Regional snapshot – state of the media³⁹

Southern Region: An August 2022 report by RSF found that there were no longer any women journalists working in Helmand, Nimroz, or Zabul provinces – despite no media outlets closing in Zabul. In Uruzgan, 75 per cent of women journalists left their jobs. Although one woman continues to work in the media in Kandahar province, prior to 15 August 2021, organizations were already encountering major obstacles to recruiting and retaining women in positions in journalism. One reason for poor retention rates was that international organizations offered women trained in this area a comparatively higher salary (for media or non-media related work).⁴⁰

Central Highland Region: Reports indicate that there are no women journalists working in Daikundi, and that 87 per cent left their jobs in Ghor and 90 per cent left their jobs in Bamiyan, compared with 41 per cent of men who are journalists who left their jobs in Daikundi, 48 per cent in Ghor, and 81 per cent in Bamiyan (the national average for male journalists was 52 per cent).⁴¹ Prior to 15 August 2021, organizations in Ghor were already reporting major obstacles in increasing the number of women journalists.⁴² Reports suggest that journalists operating in Ghor must have their content approved by the de facto ICD prior to publication.⁴³

Western Region: No women journalists are reported as working in Badghis province; although no media outlets have closed during the recent period. In Herat province, the number of women journalists and media workers fell by 93 per cent, with only 21 of 51 media outlets still operating – a 60 per cent fall. There are reports that after the de facto authorities in Herat province refused women journalists entry to press conferences on 23 May 2022, media outlets in the province dismissed all remaining women staff members.⁴⁴

Northern Region: RSF reported that no women journalists are working in Samangan province, while Jowzjan and Balkh provinces have lost 99 per cent and 91 per cent (respectively) of its women journalists and media workers. In Balkh and Jowzjan, 75 per cent and 69 per cent of men who are journalists (respectively) also lost their jobs.⁴⁵ Sar-e Pol saw a retention of just under half of the women journalists employed in that province, losing 52 per cent. In Faryab province, there are reports that the de facto ICD must approve content prior to its publication, and that all live programming has been banned.⁴⁶

39 Data on female and male journalists uses numbers from RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

40 Interview with senior women Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

41 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

42 Interview with senior women Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022

43 Written exchange with women legal experts in Afghanistan, 6 June 2022.

44 Hasht e Subh. 2022. [“Pressure on Media in Herat: female journalists have been expelled from the media.”](#) 23 May 2022.

45 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

46 Ibid.

North Eastern Region: In Badakhshan and Baghlan provinces, 94 per cent and 97 per cent (respectively) of women journalists have left their jobs; and in Takhar province, 69 per cent of men journalists left their jobs.⁴⁷ In Takhar, women journalists and media outlets had already, prior to August 2021, been receiving threats from the Taliban and members of other armed groups active in the province, aimed at stopping women from working as journalists.⁴⁸ There are reports that in Badakhshan province the de facto ICD must approve all journalistic content prior to publication.⁴⁹

Eastern Region: RSF reported that the one female journalist that had been working in Nuristan province left her job. Kunar province had no active women journalists prior to August 2021. Nangarhar was hit by the closure of 35 per cent of its media outlets, which has meant that 73 per cent of female and 50 per cent of male journalists lost their job.⁵⁰ In Nangarhar province, where four women media workers were killed in early 2021, the number of women working in the media fell by 73 per cent, from 65 to 17. Laghman province saw an 81 per cent drop.⁵¹

South Eastern Region: No women journalists were reported as working in Paktika, Paktia or Ghazni provinces – despite no media outlets closing in Ghazni. In the latter province, women journalists and media outlets had already received threats prior to August 2021, issued by the Taliban and members of other armed groups active in the province, with the aim of stopping women from working as journalists.⁵² There are reports that journalists in Logar province must have their contents approved by the de facto ICD prior to publication.

Capital Region: According to RSF, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa and Kabul each has at least one women journalist or media worker still working. Kabul province (which had around 1,445 women journalists and media workers at the start of August 2021) also saw a 61 per cent decline in the number of working women journalists. Only 555 women remained employed in the media in Kabul by August 2022. The number of media outlets in Kabul also halved during this period – of the 133 recorded prior to 15 August, only 70 are still operating. In Parwan province, 7 out of the 10 media outlets have closed and 88 per cent of male journalists have lost their jobs.⁵³

47 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

48 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

49 Written exchange with women legal experts in Afghanistan, 6 June 2022.

50 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

51 [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

52 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

53 RSF. 2022. [“Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul”](#).

Women in the media

Within media outlets with a strong culture and history of employing women, there are reports that women have largely stayed in their jobs, albeit with their **roles mostly reduced to behind-the-scenes office work rather than front-facing engagement**.⁵⁴ This tendency towards behind-the-scenes work will likely increase given that the latest media decree requires women to cover their faces when appearing on TV. The lack of willingness of heads of media outlets to keep women in their positions has been an influencing factor on the number of women retained.⁵⁵

Women journalists have noted the balancing act required by heads of media outlets on the one hand trying to hold on to progress around media freedoms and gender equality achieved over the past 20 years and, on the other, minimize the risk of being shut down by the de facto authorities.⁵⁶ This, in turn, influences institutional culture, as can be seen in the **solidarity shown by male journalists** at TOLONews and TV1, who, after the 21 May 2022 order requiring women journalists to cover their face when on air, initially wore facemasks alongside their women colleagues.⁵⁷ The facemask campaign briefly made waves across Twitter, with international journalists posting photos to show their own solidarity with Afghan women journalists.

It is likely, however, that as the de facto authorities continue to consolidate their approach toward exercising the power they have arrogated, the amount of space available to those in decision-making capacities to challenge ideological rules will decrease. This is likely to only cause the **further erasure of women's presence and perspectives from public spaces**, removing a sense of inclusion, and stopping women from seizing future opportunities for more visible work or promotion – or simply benefiting from working in a team. Reports suggest that **women's salaries have decreased disproportionately** compared to those of their male colleagues – although it is noted that gender pay gaps in the media sector is a longstanding issue that pre-dates the Taliban takeover – and their salaries are in some cases not paid on time.⁵⁸

Some women journalists reported asking their employer whether they could return to their jobs, but being refused due to the rules targeting women, including the requirements for women to cover their faces on television.⁵⁹ One women journalist noted: “Since there is no restriction on men, men can work freely and [as a result] there is more focus on hiring men in the media.”⁶⁰ These patterns set a **pathway toward widening employment disparities between men and women**, which had only recently begun to narrow. The cumulative impact of the quasi-erasure of women from the media sector is a setback that will be felt for years to come.

54 Interview with senior Afghan women media figure, 6 May 2022; interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

55 Ibid.

56 Comment made during focus group discussion on 26 June 2022.

57 This has reportedly not continued as the de facto authorities subsequently pressured the media outlets to cease:

58 Comment made during focus group discussion on 26 June 2022.

59 Comment made during focus group discussion on 16 June 2022.

60 Comment made during focus group discussion on 21 June 2022.

Those women journalists who do remain in their posts tend to come under increasing strain, due to the directives of the de facto authorities and **pressure from their family, employer, and community**. In a society where women and men who are not related are often encouraged not to interact with each other, there is significant social resistance to women taking on a profession which requires a broad network of relationships and regular interaction with men.⁶¹ Some perceive journalism as an ‘immoral’ profession for women.⁶² As one women journalist pointed out in a focus group discussion: “I am harassed while I go to collect reports by the community. The community [is more] conservative than before.”⁶³

While these restrictive social norms were already present prior to August 2021, the hard-won structures forged by the strength and goodwill of women journalists who challenged these norms – both socially and legally – have been dismantled. The de facto authorities have instead issued directives generally confining women to the home and when outside of the home, imposing the requirement of face coverings and a male chaperone.⁶⁴ These regulations, the consequential shift in social norms, and associated security concerns for women has led many of the families of women journalists to pressure them into not continuing with, or returning to, their work. Similarly, women journalists report that male-owned media outlets are increasingly reluctant to hire women.⁶⁵

61 Interview with senior women Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

62 Association of Women in Radio and Television (Afghanistan Chapter). September 2021. Personal security (safety), problems in the working environment and issues encountered with reporting autonomy of women journalists in ‘Afghanistan’.

63 Comment made during focus group discussion on 21 June 2022.

64 United Nations. 2022. [Afghanistan: Taliban orders women to stay home; cover up in public](#). Women, 7 May 2022.

65 Comment made during focus group discussion on 21 June 2022.



Prior to August 15, 2021, Shayesta*, 22, worked as program producer for a local radio station in Afghanistan. *Name have been changed to ensure safety of women journalists.

Photo: © UNWomen/Nangyalai Tanai

Text box: Recommendations from women journalists in Afghanistan

In June 2022, three focus group discussions were convened with Afghan women inside the country, with 29 participants primarily from northern and southern parts of the country. The recommendations below reflect the views put forward by the participants.

The international community should:

- **Provide** journalists, particularly women journalists, with various types of training to deal with the new political and security realities, **compensate** for the loss of experienced colleagues, and **upskill** in the search for new job opportunities. Training should cover **journalistic standards, fact-checking** (e.g. open-source intelligence (OSINT) collection and analysis); **English language** courses; and **digital and personal safety**.
- **Support** the new cadre of journalists in the country who have joined media outlets following the mass exodus of seasoned media workers with training on core journalistic standards and competencies.
- **Ensure financial and livelihood support** for women journalists to apply the training and experience gained over the past 20 years within the parameters of the current situation. Efforts should focus on creating **alternative platforms** for women to safely continue using their skills and expertise as a journalist; for example, by producing various reports for UN and international agencies, or contributing to online news platforms.
- **Undertake stronger advocacy on the situation of women journalists**, as national actors cannot fulfil this role without putting themselves at risk. For example, a committee chaired by a UN entity could be created to provide **a platform to advocate for women journalists and monitor their safety**.
- **Encourage media outlets to take action on gender inclusivity**, including by building inclusive and **safe working environments** for women journalists, **pay equity**, and exploring **opportunities to retain or rehire** women journalists within the current environment. For example, where women must take on behind-the-scenes work, retrain them for management positions; and utilize existing resources⁶⁶ providing guidance on ensuring safe and inclusive working environments for women journalists.
- **Sustain media outlets struggling to survive financially**, by means of funding support. Women journalists raised concerns that financial constraints are leading some media companies to privilege the retention of men over women, due to the challenges related to navigating the broader restrictions targeting women.

66 GIJN (Global Investigative Journalism Network). 2022. [Resources for Female-Identifying Journalists; UNESCO. 2021. Gender-sensitive safety polities for newsrooms: guidelines + checklist.](#)

Social media

For those Afghans with regular access to the internet, **social media has provided an alternative to traditional media**, for both obtaining and sharing information. The continued uptake in social media seen in Afghanistan is linked to the anonymity of social media, in a context of intense repression and in a period that has seen large numbers of Afghans (including an estimated 1,000 journalists⁶⁷) flee the country. Women users based in country often create anonymous accounts or use pseudonyms to ensure their safety and reduce the likelihood of harassment and abuse.⁶⁸

Even prior to August 2021, social media was reportedly being routinely used to question a woman's integrity and/or respectability.⁶⁹ Women journalists state that despite the anonymity, there is still **a tendency toward self-censorship**.⁷⁰ Opportunities to engage on social media differ significantly between women and men journalists, with the latter not forced to confront risks simply by being present online, as journalists who are men are not seen as transgressing socially acceptable behaviour.⁷¹ Although social media provides a platform that women journalists would no longer otherwise have, in a context where the flow of fake news is prolific and already difficult to identify, the need to remain anonymous is a major obstacle to being able to meaningfully contribute to debate and influence content.

As seen in usage of other technology, women and men enjoy **differential access to social media** – a pattern observed well before the culminating events of 15 August 2021. In 2012, only 32 per cent of Afghan women had only shared access to a mobile phone – the owner usually being a male relative.⁷²

Many of the reasons cited as barriers to ownership remain (indeed, are again increasingly) relevant – **conservative social norms** meant a lack of “permission from their family members”, and costs were prohibitive (especially in the frame of **financial dependence** on family members). Ten years on, in January 2022, social media platforms indicated similarly significant disparities in usage, with Facebook and Instagram citing their advertising audience in Afghanistan as 18.2 per cent female and 81.7 per cent male; in January 2021, Twitter cited their statistics as 4.2 per cent female and 95.8 per cent male.⁷³ Access differs widely across Afghanistan and between urban and rural settings, as it is highly dependent on existing infrastructure, poverty, and gender norms.

Despite a growth of digital media agencies, social media content is not comparable to traditional journalism. There is little accurate information and the accuracy of information is limited as posts are not required to follow journalistic standards in evidence gathering, verification or reporting.⁷⁴ Divisive, false, and toxic content can proliferate on social media, sometimes promoting ethnic tensions, misogyny and intensifying schisms between Afghans outside Afghanistan and those remaining within the country. **Reports suggest that the amount and impact of this destructive content has increased** since August 2021.⁷⁵ Narratives sometimes circulate on such platforms which foster the divisive idea that those who remained in Afghanistan support the Taliban and those who left looted the country's resources and abandoned their homeland.⁷⁶ These narratives demonstrate a renewed need to focus on journalistic standards to tackle the battleground that social media has become in Afghanistan.

67 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

68 Comments made during focus group discussions with Afghan women on 16, 21 and 26 June 2022.

69 Lindamood, L.S. *In Study of Social Media in Afghanistan, Women Report Mixed Feelings*. Open Asia. 3 March 2021.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 USAID. 2013. *Connecting to Opportunity*.

73 As noted above, these figures should be understood to provide an indication of the disparity between men and women. Audience advertising data does not give a fully accurate representation of individual accounts, nor of male and female users (particularly in a context where women users often make anonymous, albeit gender-specific, accounts): Kemp, S. 2022. *Digital 2022: Afghanistan*.

74 Various interviews with Afghan media figures and an Afghan women's rights activist, 6-10 May 2022.

75 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

76 Ibid.

Media repression

Reports indicate that the level of media repression has risen in recent months, and that information is more tightly controlled in the provinces.⁷⁷ This could be because representatives of the de facto authorities at the local level tend to be more conservative, international attention on the issue is weaker (as the presence at the provincial level is smaller), and the local journalism community more easily recognizable within such communities.⁷⁸ These issues were also at play prior to August 2021, with reports suggesting significant repression and threats from both the Taliban and actors from the democratically elected government.⁷⁹ It is also worth noting that larger, Kabul-based media outlets can more easily absorb external pressure on journalists than smaller outlets in the provinces,⁸⁰ although outlets based in the capital are not immune to scrutiny, which may allow some smaller outlets to operate unnoticed, under the radar.⁸¹

A climate of repression limits media outlets to coverage of solely the innocuous stories of daily Afghanlife or issues related to humanitarian assistance programmes.⁸² Under the GoIRA, media outlets were able to exert pressure on the Government and, in many cases, successfully push back on policies impinging upon independent journalism. The media during that period thus played a watchdog role, holding government to account for decisions taken. An example of this dynamic can be seen in the overturning of a ban on live coverage of security incidents, after a strong coordinated response from Afghan journalists.⁸³

Currently, under the de facto authorities, **security incidents and crimes go unreported, and unacknowledged by the authorities.**⁸⁴ This reality on the ground was described by a women's rights activist as leaving her "feeling completely blind", without access to information about what is occurring in the country.⁸⁵ The lack of accountability mechanisms is compounded by the decision of the de facto authorities to dissolve the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), an independent entity within the governmental architecture that served as a watchdog on human rights.

Harassment and violence against media professionals

During the first 100 days under the de facto authorities, **at least six journalists (including two women) lost their lives** – under varying circumstances.⁸⁶ During this time frame, there were also regular **raids on journalists' homes, beatings, arrests, threats, and the forcing of women reporters off the air.**⁸⁷ Journalists and media workers have been targeted, including with beatings and arrests, for covering peaceful protests, including those on women's rights. By March 2022, 79 per cent of women journalists surveyed reported having been insulted or threatened under the rule of the de facto authorities, including abuse by Taliban officials.⁸⁸ These attacks and arbitrary detentions suggest **systematic efforts by the intelligence service and police to exert control and coerce the media** into delivering reporting that aligns with the wishes of the de

77 Qaane, E. 2022. [Regime change](#).

78 Ibid.

79 HRW. 2021. "[Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists](#)." News, 1 April 2021. United States Department of State. 2011. [2010 Human Rights Report](#). Washington D.C.: US Department of State. 8 April 2011.

80 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

81 Ibid.

82 Malik, A. 2022. "[Afghanistan's Watchdog Journalists Turn to Leaks and Offshore Sites](#)." GIJN. Press Freedom, 15 February 2022.

83 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

84 Various interviews with Afghan media figures and an Afghan women's rights activist, 6-10 May 2022.

85 Interview with women Afghan women's rights activist, 10 May 2022.

86 UNAMA. [Human Rights in Afghanistan](#).

87 Malik A. 2022. "[Afghanistan's Watchdog](#)"; CPJ. 2021. [How the Taliban takeover is affecting Afghan media](#).

88 IFJ (International Federation of Journalists). 2022. "[Afghanistan: 87% of women journalists have suffered discrimination under Taliban rule](#)." News, 9 March 2022

facto authorities. It also pushes those experienced journalists who remain in Afghanistan to abandon their profession; in the words of one women journalist: “I will never want to work as a journalist – I cannot bear the fear, arrests, and torture by the Taliban”.⁸⁹ Reports suggest international journalists are also being targeted, harassed, and detained by de facto authorities.⁹⁰

Harassment and attacks on journalists outside major urban areas have allegedly gone largely unreported. Nevertheless, clear – albeit not always gender disaggregated – **patterns have been identified and documented nationwide**.⁹¹ In September and October 2021, some entities reported 30 instances of intimidation and physical violence against journalists, of which 90 per cent were reportedly perpetrated by the de facto authorities.⁹² In several of these cases, journalists were detained for at least 24 hours, and one journalist was murdered.⁹³ Of these 30 cases reported, 6 occurred in Kabul (with the remaining cases occurring across various provinces).⁹⁴

Between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported **122 cases of arbitrary arrest** (of which one concerned a woman) and **58 instances of torture and ill treatment** (of which one concerned a woman), **12 cases of incommunicado detention** (all concerning men), and **22 cases of threats or intimidation** (of which three concerned women), of which nearly 95 per cent were attributed to the de facto authorities.⁹⁵ These violations have seemingly been consistently committed across the 11 months since 15 August 2021, with UNAMA documenting **2 murders, 2 cases of grievous bodily harm and 44 cases of temporary arrest, beating or threatening** of journalists (of which 42 were attributed to the de facto authorities) between 15 August and 31 December 2021.⁹⁶

RSF recorded **50 cases of journalists and media workers arrested** by the police and intelligence actors between 15 August 2021 and February 2022.⁹⁷ The Afghanistan Journalists Centre recorded **at least 72 cases of detention** of journalists by security forces between 15 August 2021 and 26 March 2022.⁹⁸ The absence of gender-disaggregated data requires rectification as the journalism community – nor the threats faced by individuals – cannot be considered as homogenous.

89 Comment made during focus group discussion on 26 June 2022.

90 O'Donnell, L. 2022. “[The Taliban Detained Me for Doing My Job. I Can Never Go Back.](#)” Foreign Policy. 20 July 2022; CPJ. 2022. “[Taliban intelligence officers force Foreign Policy columnist Lynne O'Donnell to tweet apologies for her reporting.](#)” . 21 July 2022.

91 HRW. 2022. “[Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.](#)” News, 7 March 2022.

92 Das, D. 2021. “[Afghanistan: Over 30 Cases Of Violence Against Journalists Recorded Since Taliban Takeover.](#)” Republic World. World News, 28 October 2021.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 UNAMA. [Human Rights in Afghanistan.](#)

96 UNGA (United Nations General Assembly). 2022. [Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7. A/76/862-S/2022/485](#), 15 June 2022; [Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/76/667-S/2022/64](#), 18 January 2022.

97 RSF. 2022. “[Afghan journalists increasingly harassed by Taliban intelligence and new ministry.](#)” 4 February 2022.

98 AJC. 2022. [Taliban detained two Journalists over coverage of protests on girls' school ban.](#) News, 26 March 2022.

Impact on gender equality and women's rights

The impact of the repression and censorship of the media has meant that **women's voices and experiences are increasingly erased**, both as women journalists and media workers are increasingly invisible, as well as women's rights and gender equality as a news topic. This development risks perpetuating two long-standing contradictory issues.

Firstly, **removing the ability of Afghan women to tell their own stories and perpetuating the narrative that women are victims** in need of protection – a narrative put forward by the de facto authorities to justify restrictions on women and girls – limits their political agency and the space to ask and raise complex questions about their experiences.⁹⁹ This creates an obstacle for women to operate as independent, political actors and build networks, and for the provision of targeted support from international actors as requested by, and relevant to, Afghan women. Delinking women's rights and gender equality issues from political and security dynamics also reinforces the view that gender equality is a 'women's topic' rather than embedded in broader contextual dynamics. These dynamics further diminish the role of women in public life which further fragments an already brittle social fabric.

Secondly, the current weakened state of the media creates **a fertile environment for human rights abuses**, including violations of women's rights and violence against women, to remain unheard and committed with impunity.¹⁰⁰ It will prove difficult – if not impossible, to gauge levels

of violations and violence against women, build strategies to combat this phenomenon, and ensure accountability if these cases go unreported and unknown. This impunity is compounded by the dissolution of broader mechanisms to address human rights – like the AIHRC – and disrupted systems for supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

Removing the presence of women in the entertainment and news spaces negatively impacts social and cultural norms in Afghanistan as it substantively erodes the fundamentals of a democratic and dynamic civic space. Such exclusion negatively impacts social and cultural norms in Afghanistan, by reinforcing values that suppress women's rights. Over the past 20 years, the media has contributed significantly to shifting perceptions of women's rights, empowerment, and education. Human Rights Watch reported in 2020 that exposure to media positively drove attitudinal change within families around girl's education.¹⁰¹ The reverse development can now be expected, where **attitudes within families once again become more restrictive towards women and girls** – and there is indication that this is already happening in more conservative areas.¹⁰²

The future of the Afghan media

The schism between Afghans in the country and those outside is mirrored in the media sector.

Those outside of Afghanistan can generally broadcast with less fear of reprisal, but do not have access to the same information channels available to Afghans inside the country. While there are reports of local journalists sending information overseas for publication, it is difficult to verify the extent of this activity and based on anecdotal evidence, it appears to be a rare occurrence.¹⁰³ There is some

99 Ghani, A. 2021. "[Making Sense of Afghanistan: The Failures of Coverage, and What Comes Next.](#)" GIJN. GJIC21, 5 November 2021.

100 The GIJN reports that journalists feel unable to independently check their stories. For example, when a women volleyball player was beheaded, nobody dared to verify it with the victim's parents or families. Malik. 2022. "[Afghanistan's Watchdog.](#)"; Ghani, A. 2021 "[Making Sense of Afghanistan.](#)"

101 SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction). 2021. [Support for Gender Equality: Lessons from the US experience in Afghanistan](#), 88. Virginia: SIGAR. February 2021.

102 Interview with senior women Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

103 Malik, A. 2022. "[Afghanistan's Watchdog.](#)"; Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

criticism over the **perceived exacerbation by external media sources of tensions between the de facto authorities and communities**, cited as making it harder for those inside Afghanistan to find ways to work and survive under the changed (and constantly changing) conditions; and negotiate and engage with the de facto authorities.¹⁰⁴

There are reports of **initiatives to support journalists**, including a nascent digital platform for women journalists where experienced women journalists – many who have left Afghanistan – can problem-solve, mentor and support those still operating within the country.¹⁰⁵ This speaks to an important effort to bridge the Afghan media community inside the country and that scattered across the world. Most senior, experienced – well-known – journalists have left the country, taking with them their knowledge, expertise, and networks.¹⁰⁶ For their part, those journalists remaining in Afghanistan are operating in a very difficult environment, where security training is vital to their safety and ability to continue (investigative) reporting.

Bringing new journalists up to speed quickly on core journalistic standards and ethical reporting

is also critical. This endeavour is particularly important, for example, in regard to any reporting of issues or incidents of gender-based violence. There currently exists opportunities for both mentoring and capacity building. However, the scope of activities in this area is hindered by barriers to freedom of movement and safe passage into and out of Afghanistan, for women in particular, and divisions between those living inside and outside Afghan borders. Addressing the range of challenges faced by women journalists requires not only shifts in the media landscape, but also improvements in the overall status of women's rights. It is imperative to understand the wider context of women's rights as the media sector is ultimately a microcosm of the broader gender inequality at play.

104 Interview with women Afghan women's rights activist, 10 May 2022.

105 Interview with senior women Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

106 Interview with senior male Afghan media figure, 6 May 2022.

The future for media outlets still operating in Afghanistan remains unclear. **Financial issues** are unlikely to be resolved in the short term, due to prevailing sanctions impacting Afghanistan. De facto spokesperson and deputy de facto Minister of Culture and Information, Zabiullah Mujahid, announced that the ruling authorities would re-establish **a de facto media commission**.¹⁰⁷ This commission will likely have the exclusive mandate to deal with complaints, including criminal allegations, against journalists and media outlets and refer cases to relevant judicial institutions. If established, the independence and resourcing of this institution would be critical.

Many women journalists still working in country note that they would not currently consider approaching Taliban members to **file complaints**.¹⁰⁸ While the underlying reasoning of this stance is clear, a change of tack may in many cases streamline interaction between the media and the de facto authorities – depending on who is sitting on the complaints commission, and under which de facto institution it would be mandated. It is unlikely, however, to reverse any of the current restrictions and censorship in place.

The current de facto legal framework is particularly challenging in this regard: **All laws providing safeguards and protection for journalists have been abolished**, and, in criminal cases, are purposely vague. Similarly, rules prohibiting violation of 'religious and Afghan values' allow for a broad range of content to be construed as warranting punitive action. A de facto media commission of this nature, established within Taliban structures, will also be unlikely to produce meaningful impact that constructively addresses the specific issues faced by women journalists.

107 Qaane, E. 2002. [Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What has happened to the Afghan media? Afghan Analysts Network](#).

108 Comment made during focus group discussion on 26 June 2022.

3

KEY RECOMMEN- DATIONS AND RESOURCE LIST

Key recommendations for the international community

1. Put in place measures to enable the participation of women journalists in the media sector:

- **Supporting press freedom through training and funding schemes**, with measures to enable women's participation – such as covering travel costs for a mahram (if required) and ensuring that at least 30 per cent of all media training participants are women. Substantive modules for all trainees on how to apply a gender lens to reporting is equally important given the reduction in the level of content being produced in this area.
- **Investing in supporting the integration of journalistic standards** for new media staff entering the profession. For this to work, the time to act is now in the spirit of meaningfully carrying as much of the changed media culture that has occurred in the past 20 years into the current context.
- **Strengthening opportunities for women journalists to continue working** and sharing their experiences in their own words by ensuring they have the skills, knowledge, and resources to work safely and make the shift where necessary to online reporting.

- Where journalists cannot continue working, **ensuring that the specific protection needs of women journalists are understood and addressed**. For example, where women have caregiving responsibility, they may need to be sheltered or relocated internally with family members.

- **Engaging with the heads of media outlets** to understand and provide support regarding their specific needs and concerns on navigating restrictions for women journalists; and improving the workplace for conditions for women to support their participation – including equal pay – and navigation of complex political realities for women.

- ### 2. Increase the representation and influence of women journalists in online media spaces.
- This should be done by engaging journalists and women's journalist networks, providing a safe approach to maintaining women's voices and presence in the media as they continue to disappear from radio and television.

- ### 3. Ensure that all data collected related to media is disaggregated by gender.
- Access to data is needed to improve understanding of the challenges and opportunities to support a range of women media workers across Afghanistan.

Text box: Key gender-sensitive questions to consider in programming and funding support to media

1. In programmes/funding to support media and journalism standards, are Afghan women being **recognized and engaged** as equal partners?
2. In efforts to promote protection of media workers from violence, are **enabling measures** considered or in place for women facing gendered barriers to free movement and who may, for example, have additional dependents due to caregiving expectations?
3. Have **gender-sensitive indicators and training** content been integrated into programming and funding support for Afghan media outlets and journalists?

Resource List

- Free Press Unlimited 2020. [Gender and Media Resource Guide](#). FPU Resource Space.
- Global Investigative Journalism Network. 2022. [Resources for Female-Identifying Journalists](#).
- Haines, R. and T. O'Neil. 2018. [Putting gender in political economy analysis: why it matters and how to do it](#). Briefing note. Gender and Development Network.
- Qaane, E. 2022. [Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What has happened to the Afghan media?](#) Afghanistan Analysts Network.
- UNAMA. 2021. [Special Report: Killing of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021](#).
- UNESCO. 2012. [Gender-sensitive Indicators for Media: Framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content](#).
- Zausmer, R. and S. Flueckiger. 2020. [Amplifying Women's Voices - A Gender Balance Guide for Media](#). Women in News, WAN-IFRA, Sida.



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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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