



**Campaign for Girl's Access
to Education in Afghanistan**



**Stop Gender Apartheid
In Afghanistan**

Policy Recommendations for Safeguarding Women's Right to Education and Public Health Training in Afghanistan

A Strategic Framework for Change and Accountability

Dec 6, 2024

This Policy Paper represents the collective voices of campaign, including HRDs, academics, and civil society from Afghanistan and abroad.

Executive Summary

Since seizing power in August 2021, the Taliban have unleashed a wave of regressive policies that have drastically curtailed Afghan women's access to education and other basic human rights. The most recent and alarming example is the ban on women studying in public health institutions, effectively denying them the opportunity to acquire vital basic medical skills and contribute to the country's healthcare workforce.

This policy is a threat to basic human rights, including the right to education and gender equality. It also puts public health, social stability, and Afghanistan's future development at risk. The ban will lead to a shortage of female healthcare professionals, which will disproportionately affect women, especially in rural areas. As a result, women will have to seek healthcare from unqualified male providers, leading to poor health outcomes and even death.

This decision has sparked outrage from many groups, including students, parents, civil society organizations, and the global community, who are all demanding that the ban be reversed immediately, and women's educational rights be restored. The international community, including human rights organizations, has also spoken out against this move, warning that if this issue is not addressed, it could lead to gender-based discrimination becoming more accepted and set a dangerous example for other countries, ultimately hurting global progress towards gender equality and human rights.

Context and Changes

- **Recent Policy Changes:** The Taliban's latest decree, banning women from public health training, has severely damaged Afghanistan's already struggling healthcare system. This ban not only prevents women from pursuing healthcare careers but also worsens the shortage of skilled medical professionals, especially in rural areas where healthcare access is already limited. In provinces like Kandahar and Helmand, women have been their families' primary caregivers, relying on traditional remedies and basic first aid due to the lack of healthcare facilities and trained professionals. By blocking women from entering the healthcare workforce, the Taliban's decision will make the health crisis in these regions even worse.
- **Progress Undermined:** Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has made gradual progress in women's education, leading to more women working in various fields, including healthcare. For example, [by 2019, half of the students enrolled in medical schools were female](#), resulting in more female doctors and nurses serving their communities. These achievements helped address healthcare disparities, especially those affecting women and children, and improved overall well-being. However, the Taliban's regressive policies have erased these gains, undermining the progress Afghan women had made.
- **International Standards:** The Taliban's discriminatory policies flagrantly violate internationally recognized human rights frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These treaties obligate states and de facto authorities to ensure equal access to education and professional opportunities for all, without discrimination. The international community has

consistently emphasized the importance of education in promoting peace, stability, and economic growth. By defying these principles, the Taliban is not only harming Afghan women but also creating a hurdle to the country's development and prosperity.

Key Implications

- **Public Health Crisis:** The Taliban's exclusion of women from health training programs is crippling a vital resource for improving maternal and child health, combating the spread of communicable diseases, and providing essential services to a population in dire need of medical attention. In many Afghan communities, women healthcare workers are the sole culturally acceptable option for female patients, who rely on them for sensitive and private care. Without these dedicated professionals, healthcare access and quality of care will plummet, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable segments of society, such as pregnant women, newborns, and young children.
- **Human Rights Violations:** Education is a fundamental human right enshrined in international treaties and conventions. By denying women access to education and professional training, the Taliban are committing a blatant violation of this right, further marginalizing half the population and eroding the foundations of a just and equitable society. This brazen disregard for human rights not only affects women's lives but also perpetuates a broader culture of discrimination and oppression.
- **Socioeconomic Regressions:** The Taliban's restrictive policies on women's education are not only a personal tragedy for individual women but also a major obstacle to national development. Decades of empirical evidence from around the world have consistently shown that educating women leads to improved family health, increased economic growth, and strengthened community stability. By denying women the chance to pursue education and careers, the Taliban are putting Afghanistan's future prosperity at risk, potentially reversing years of hard-won progress and development gains.
- **Global Precedent and Influence:** The international community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the Taliban's regressive policies on women's education. Allowing such discrimination and gender persecution to persist would set a dangerous global precedent, emboldening other regimes to adopt similar measures and undermine the international human rights framework. The world would be taking a significant step backward, weakening global commitments to gender equality and jeopardizing the progress made over the past century towards a more just and equitable world. The consequences of inaction would be far-reaching, with potential repercussions felt across regions and generations.

Policy Recommendations

1. Pressure & Sanctions:

- **To hold the Taliban accountable**, the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and influential states must work together more closely, using what they've learned over the past three years. They need to take swift and decisive action to make the Taliban change their discriminatory policies and practices. This can be done by strategically using targeted sanctions, international legal actions, and diplomatic isolation to put maximum pressure on them.

- At the same time, these global actors must engage with local and regional stakeholders to **amplify demands for accountability and inclusive governance from the ground up**. By partnering with civil society organizations and local leaders, international pressure can increase legitimacy and mobilize collective resistance against regressive policies.
- **Support for human rights initiatives**, especially those focused on education, women's rights, and civil liberties, must remain a top priority. These efforts should be strengthened through international funding and oversight mechanisms that ensure aid reaches the Afghan people without benefiting the Taliban. By working together globally and strategically using the influence of powerful states, the Taliban can be compelled to follow international norms and move toward governance that is fair, people-centered, and accountable.

2. Targeted Sanctions and Accountability Measures:

- **Targeted and Enforced Sanctions**: The international community must impose strict, targeted sanctions on Taliban officials and entities responsible for regressive policies, especially those attacking education, women's rights, and basic freedoms. These sanctions must be rigorously enforced, with no exceptions or leniency, to prevent the Taliban from using resources for their oppressive agenda. We need mechanisms in place to ensure sanctions hurt the regime's leadership and infrastructure without affecting the delivery of life-saving aid to the Afghan population.
- **Independent Oversight and Accountability**: The international community needs to establish robust, independent monitoring systems to track every aspect of aid distribution, preventing the Taliban from using, manipulating or intercepting these resources. This includes deploying the watchdogs, conducting mandatory third-party audits, and using advanced technologies for real-time tracking of aid flows. If there are violations or misuse, the international community must take immediate action to guarantee accountability and transparency. Under any circumstances, aid must serve the people, not the regime.

3. Support for Alternative Education Pathways:

- **Distance and Online Learning**: Fund and expand education initiatives, community-based learning centers, and cross-border scholarship programs to ensure Afghan women can continue their education despite local barriers.
- **Civil Society Partnerships**: Collaborate with Afghan civil society and diaspora networks to provide safe, decentralized learning opportunities and vocational training.

The Taliban's ban on women's access to public health education is not an isolated restriction, but rather a calculated move in a larger strategy to push women to the fringes of Afghan society. This policy poses a significant threat to Afghanistan's public health, socioeconomic stability, and integration on the global stage. The country's health system, already broken by the Taliban's policy, will crumble further as women, who make up a significant portion of the healthcare workforce, are forced out of their jobs. This, in turn, will lead to a decline in healthcare services, exacerbating the prevalence of preventable diseases and maternal mortality rates. Moreover, the economic impact will be severe, as the exclusion of women from the workforce will stifle economic growth and increase the country's dependence on foreign aid. The Taliban's

actions will also have far-reaching consequences for Afghanistan's global standing, damaging its relationships with international organizations and governments that value human rights and gender equality.

It is imperative that the international community abandons its short-sighted pursuit of political expediency and adopts a principled, rights-based approach. By doing so, they can safeguard the fundamental human rights of Afghan women, restore their rightful place in the education system, and ensure the long-term health and prosperity of Afghanistan and the global community. The international community must recognize the value of women's education and empowerment. By standing together, they can uphold the dignity and rights of Afghan women and help Afghanistan reclaim its place as a respected member of the international community.

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