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PROMOTING THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN HUMANITARIAN WORKERS IN AFGHANISTAN



GENDER
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION
Afghanistan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	10
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	11
CONTEXT IN AFGHANISTAN, AND WOMEN'S RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN HUMANITARIAN WORK	13
KEY FINDINGS	15
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR AFGHAN WOMEN'S RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN HUMANITARIAN AID AGENCIES	15
Personal, family and cultural barriers for women in humanitarian organizations	15
Barriers to recruitment of women employees	17
Barriers to retention of women staff	18
Specific barriers posed by the DfA takeover since August 2021	20
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN STAFF: EXISTING GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD	23
Advocacy with the DfA	26
Recommendations for recruitment processes	26
Recommendations for retention of women staff	27
Recommendations for support of local women-led NGOs and CSOs	28
CONCLUSION	29
ANNEXES	30
Annex 1 – Key informant interview tools	30
Annex 2 – Focus group discussion tool	33
Annex 3 – Participating organizations	35
ADDITIONAL REFERENCES	36

ACRONYMS

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DfA	De facto Authorities
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
HR	Human Resources
IOM	International Organization for Migrations
KII	Key Informant Interview
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PSEA	Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Funds
UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Funds
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNV	United Nations Volunteers (UNV)
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For decades, Afghanistan has been one of the worst countries to be a woman, a situation which has been exacerbated since the regime change in August 2021. In 2022, Afghanistan was at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Index.¹ Propped up by international support, the significant gains made in the area of women's rights and agency in the last two decades have been eroded with the overturning of the previous government and the coming to power of the Taliban.

The economic challenges faced by the country since the takeover by the de facto authorities (DfA) have triggered a food security crisis and reduced the population's access to basic needs. The DfA's lack of international recognition and the withdrawal of some international funding has precipitated a massive humanitarian crisis. Despite announcements that women's rights would be respected in the framework of Islam, the DfA have imposed increasingly stringent restrictions on women and girls, including on their right to education, employment, and their access to public life.

Women and girls make up around half the population of Afghanistan, and it is critical to ensure that they receive humanitarian and life-saving assistance. Women all over the world are differently impacted by crises and face heightened risks in humanitarian settings due to displacement and the breakdown of protection structures². In the cultural context of Afghanistan, women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the current economic and humanitarian crisis, as well as the recent natural disasters which have impacted the country³.

Due to the current restrictions on women's mobility including the mandatory requirement for a *mahram (male escort)* as well as the compulsory dress code, women and girls are indeed facing increased challenges in accessing humanitarian aid and services.⁴ They face difficulty in reaching distribution points, obtaining information on humanitarian assistance as well as voicing their concerns and humanitarian needs. As women are less and less able to access assistance, only 10 percent of them said they were able to cover their basic needs in 2022, compared to 23 percent of men.⁵

Women humanitarian workers play a critical role in ensuring women's access to humanitarian assistance. In the context of many restrictions on women's lives, women aid workers are indeed best placed to work around the barriers facing women and girls. Cultural restrictions make it difficult for men humanitarian workers to assist women and girls due to restrictive norms around women family members being in contact with men outside the household. This has meant that male workers do not always have access to homes to conduct the needs assessment and monitoring that are needed for rational and equitable aid distribution. When they participate in these exercises, women humanitarian workers ensure that women are reached during field assessments, that distribution points run by women for women can be set up and that women can speak to women to express their feedback on the humanitarian aid received. Without women humanitarian workers, vulnerable groups such as women headed households who do not have male family members to engage with humanitarian

1 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2022, available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf

2 ActionAid (2016). *On the frontline: Catalyzing women's leadership in humanitarian action*

3 Gender Update, Earthquake Paktika and Khost Provinces, GiHA Working Group, 23 June, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/gender-update-earthquake-paktika-and-khost-provinces-gihaworking-group-and-women-advisory-group-wag-afghanistan-humanitarian-country-team-hct-23-june-2022>

4 Mid-Year Whole of Afghanistan Assessment, 2022, REACH, available at: https://www.impactrepository.org/document/reach/71cbocab/REACH_Evolution-Needs-Article_Mid-year-WoAA_April-2022_ToShare.pdf

5 forthcoming Rapid Gender Analysis, 2022. Afghanistan GiHA Working Group

workers, are at risk of being completely left out of the humanitarian response. Women's participation in humanitarian assistance is thus crucial to ensuring aid reaches the most vulnerable groups including widows and children, women'-headed households, disabled women, and the elderly.

Since the takeover by the DfA however, many challenges have been impeding the participation of women humanitarian workers in the response. Women aid workers are only officially allowed to work in very few provinces,⁶ and even there they are facing many restrictions, such as the need to be accompanied by a male guardian while performing their duty, specifically, making it extremely difficult for women to continue working.⁷ While these restrictions have not been applied uniformly across the country, the lack of clarity around the rules have also created further difficulties for humanitarian agencies when adapting their response to deploy women staff on the ground. These challenges have deeply impacted the humanitarian response in Afghanistan, and as the humanitarian crisis in the country continues to deepen, and spaces for women and girls shrink further, the UN, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need to engage actively with women's causes, and involve women to ensure humanitarian action can reach women, men, girls, and boys and the most vulnerable sections of the population.

In order to map challenges and to find practical solutions to ensure women's participation in the humanitarian response, and in line with humanitarian and UN commitments to gender equality and women's participation, the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group in Afghanistan, co-chaired by UN Women and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), commissioned this study. The study aims to identify specific barriers faced by Afghan women in their recruitment and retention by humanitarian aid agencies. It also aims to share best practices and recommendations for reversing these barriers, and for enabling more women to participate in humanitarian action. This will be vital for ensuring access by women, children, and marginalized

groups to life-saving assistance as the humanitarian and economic crisis in the country deepens.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative methodology involving key informant interviews (KIIs) with human-resource (HR) managers and gender coordinators from a representative group of international NGOs, national NGOs, and UN agencies working in Afghanistan, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with Afghan women currently working with various humanitarian aid organizations. A total of 43 organizations were included in the study. Fourteen interviews and 56 FGDs were organized. All 74 FGD participants and 11 of the 16 KII respondents (70 percent) were women. FGDs were held in the UN Women offices in five provinces: Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Kandahar, and Nangarhar.

Findings: Barriers to recruitment and retention

Barriers identified to the recruitment and retention of Afghan women, including personal, social, and professional barriers, vary in degree from region to region. While the situation in Kabul is somewhat better, in the provinces barriers for women are intensified due to more conservative cultures, fewer resources and lower digital connectivity, while the context in the provinces is also a function of the specific views of the de facto authorities (DfAs) at the local level.

- The **exodus of qualified men and women** since the takeover by the Taliban has created a shortfall specifically of qualified women. Afghan men typically already had more access to higher education and professional development opportunities, both in-country and abroad, and thus the number of qualified professional women was already less than that of men even before the DfA takeover.

6 Afghanistan: Taliban Blocking Women Aid Workers, Human Rights Watch, November 2021, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/04/afghanistan-taliban-blocking-women-aid-workers>

7 Women's Rights in Afghanistan One Year After the Taliban Takeover, UN Women, August 2022, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Gender-alert-2-Womens-rights-in-Afghanistan-oneyear-after-the-Taliban-take-over-en.pdf>



- **Less resourced local organizations** are unable to attract qualified women professionals who still remain in the country. These women are in high demand and are absorbed by UN agencies and the international NGOs. This leaves few to choose from for local organizations, which lack resources to offer competitive compensation packages.
- Sometimes **complicated online job application procedures**, which require strong internet connectivity, pose a barrier for women to access and apply for the jobs.
- **Fewer opportunities for higher education or professional development for women** have resulted in high competition from male counterparts, so that women tend not to be selected for technical or senior management or leadership roles. If selected, they do not receive adequate mentoring support and encouragement within

the organizations, and often resign due to work pressures. The **compulsory dress code and the requirement of a mahram** also pose barriers, particularly for women who don't have a *mahram* or when the male members of the family have their own livelihoods or education needs.

- **Women field workers fear being stopped and questioned at security checkpoints** of the Taliban. The DfA's **refusal to interact with women** poses yet another barrier to women's recruitment to leadership and senior management positions.
- **Men in leadership and male colleagues** at times passively or actively make the work environment unfriendly for women colleagues, discouraging them from continuing in their jobs. According to a number of women participating in the FGDs, male colleagues may worry about accompanying women during fieldwork due to possibilities of problems with the Taliban. Some women suspect the men feel vindicated in their opinion that women are not competent to work, and in the current environment, feel freer to express this attitude.
- Due to the **additional needs of women staff, such as facilities for childcare, separate work spaces, or transport**, some organizations find it more economically convenient to recruit men.
- **Cultural and perception barriers** are another challenge, such as families considering NGO and UN jobs inappropriate for women, and disapproval of elders, neighbours, even beneficiary communities assisted by these women.
- **Women's child-care and domestic responsibilities**, as well as their overall roles as care providers in the family, are other important challenges, especially when they have younger children or older family members.
- Personally too, **women often lack confidence** in their own abilities and therefore do not apply for jobs.

Best practices and recommendations

A number of international NGOs and UN agencies have already adopted measures to attract, recruit, and retain Afghan women staff. Some successful strategies for attracting women applicants include announcing **women-only positions**, using **multiple alternatives job announcement methods** such as circulating job openings internally among staff and through HR and personal networks, and head hunting. **Lowering requirements for women candidates during shortlisting and practicing positive discrimination** in favour of women candidates during selection have also helped women candidates be hired who would otherwise not have been able to compete with more qualified male applicants. **Couples hire** is another method that is effective for increasing women's recruitment, particularly in the provinces and for fieldwork.

Professional internship programmes have proved to be effective in inducting educated women with little or no relevant experience into the workforce, by providing opportunity for practical on-the-job training and mentoring so that they can be hired to positions that open up at the end of the internship, if they are adequately prepared. **Internal promotions of women staff** have enabled upward movement over time so that women can take on more responsibility in decision-making roles. **For field positions, posting printed job announcement in local languages** in public places, and spreading the word through personal and professional networks has helped. **Establishing and tracking gender-parity targets** in recruitment has assisted organizations to find creative ways to reach women aspirants for jobs.

Staff retention has been assisted by **providing safe and respectful work environments and adequate support to women staff** such as maternity leave, childcare support, sufficient cost allowance and facilities for *mahram* requirements, safe transport, and flexible work hours and modalities, in particular for breastfeeding mothers or women with very young children. Other incentives that worked are **professional capacity building and higher education support** provided to staff, with more allowance for women staff so that they can experience career growth.

Case-by-case negotiations with the DfA to resolve specific barriers faced by women staff in different locations has also proven to be an effective strategy in the current context for women staff retention.

Some general recommendations for all humanitarian aid actors, in particular for UN and international agencies, include the following:

- Developing accessible offline mediums for job announcements
- Ensuring simpler application processes
- Adjusting selection criteria to the limitations faced by some women candidates and adopting positive discrimination in favour of women applicants, e.g., not making English-language and computer competencies criteria for recruitment of qualified technical staff
- Having one or more women panellist during all job interviews
- Having and communicating clear codes of conduct for all staff for preventing gender-based discrimination and abuse, and effective mechanisms for addressing complaints
- Providing adequate supports for women employees like safe transport, separate work spaces, maternity leave, flexible work timings, possibility of work from home, mahram support during field works and other modalities, as needed
- Advocacy with donors to sustain and support local and women-led NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs)
- Dialogue and advocacy with DfAs to enable women to fully participate across the spectrum of humanitarian action, particularly to ensure effective and timely service delivery for women and girls
- Implementing partnerships with local and women-led NGOs and CSOs
- Strengthening women-led coalitions and networks such as the AWN, to build support for local women civil society activists and humanitarian workers

INTRODUCTION

Women and girls are differently affected by humanitarian crises. They are disproportionately exposed to increased loss of livelihoods, security, and even lives, during and in the aftermath of crises and natural disasters⁸ and they are more at risk of suffering from displacement and protection issues. This is particularly the case in Afghanistan where strict gender norms, further compounded by the Da takeover of August 2021 and the many restrictions placed on women's rights since, are preventing women from reaching out for help, and accessing humanitarian assistance.

To ensure humanitarian aid reaches women and girls, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere, women aid workers who understand local norms and sensitivities are critical in interacting with the most vulnerable groups, in particular, women and girls, women-headed households, and disabled women. In the words of Tiina Saarikoski, the Finnish Red Cross's head of international disaster aid, writing in 2019: "It is vitally important for aid work to always involve local women in both the planning of efforts targeting them within communities and as humanitarian workers. This is the only way to reveal problems that would otherwise remain invisible and to effectively allocate aid."⁹ For short-term humanitarian assistance to provide temporary respite to impoverished populations, aid agencies deeply depend on the participation of women humanitarian aid workers in the field. Only with women at the core of the response can humanitarian actors undertake assessments, facilitate distribution of aid and conduct monitoring to ensure aid reaches the most vulnerable. In the cultural context of Afghanistan, male workers do

not have access to homes to conduct the needs assessment and monitoring needed for rational and equitable aid distribution. This has made women's participation in humanitarian assistance work crucial to ensuring that women and girls can access the needed support. With mounting humanitarian issues in the country, and shrinking spaces for women and girls, it is imperative for the humanitarian response to actively involve women.

In the current context of Afghanistan, women humanitarian workers' participation in the response has however been severely impacted, due to the many restrictions placed by the DfA on their mobility. According to a Human Rights Watch report of November 2021, the Taliban's policies preventing Afghan women from participating in humanitarian aid work are "increasingly aggravating the country's humanitarian crisis."¹⁰ This is corroborated by the findings of the recent *Analytical Brief on Challenges for Women in Afghanistan to Access Life-Depending Aid*, published by the European Institute of Peace in June 2022,¹¹ which highlights how severe limitations placed on women's mobility in public spaces, and their ability to work and earn, have put them at high risk of neglect, abuse, and food insecurity.¹²

To document barriers and challenges to the engagement of Afghan women with humanitarian aid agencies, and to identify ways of promoting the recruitment and retention of women staff in the current context of Afghanistan, the GiHA Working Group and its co-leads, UN Women and IRC have commissioned the present report.

8 Care International (2017). *Suffering in silence: The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2016*

9 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-work-requires-women>

10 <https://www.laprensalatina.com/taliban-not-allowing-women-aid-workers-in-afghanistan-says-hrw>

11 *Analytical Brief on Challenges for Women in Afghanistan to Access Life-Depending Aid*, European Institute of Peace, June 2022

12 EIP Analytical Brief-Challenges for Afghan Women to Access Aid

This document strives to serve both as a report and as a guidance note to inform humanitarian actors in Afghanistan, including UN agencies, international and national NGOs, as well as international donors and partners, about what strategies need to be adopted urgently, so that Afghan women can continue to be present in the context of the humanitarian situation unfolding in Afghanistan.

The ensuing sections describe the methodology used in the study, the perspectives of various respondents regarding the challenges to recruitment and retention of women by humanitarian agencies, and the solutions, best practices, and recommendations for action that need to be considered, to mitigate the challenges.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The current study was conducted in June and July 2022. Participating agencies were selected in consultation with the GiHA lead, in an attempt to make the responses as inclusive and representative as possible.

Study objectives

The stated objectives of the study are:

- *Documenting barriers for the recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers*
 1. What barriers (personal, familial, or social) prevent women from seeking employment with humanitarian organizations?
 2. To what extent do hiring managers or teams struggle to attract qualified women candidates and why (e.g., lack of applicants, low qualifications, unwillingness to travel)? For which specific sectors and type of jobs?
 3. Once women are hired, to what extent is retention of the same staff an issue and what are the common reasons for attrition?
 4. How has the above changed since August 2021, and why?
- *Identifying methods for promoting recruitment and retention of women humanitarian staff*
 1. What methods can humanitarian agencies employ to maximize applications by qualified women staff (e.g., in use of specific job search platforms, in-person networks, formulation of job vacancy announcements)? How would these methods vary according to location and skill level?
 2. What reasonable adjustments can be applied during recruitment cycles to mitigate gendered barriers to recruitment and to promote equitable outcomes in recruitment? E.g., lowering of qualification requirements, removal or adjustment of testing procedures, or adjustment of interview procedures and questions.
 3. What specific incentives can humanitarian agencies provide to encourage applications by women and increase retention of women staff? For example, provisions for mahram, womenspecific transport options, or subsidies.
 4. What reasonable adjustments should be provided to women humanitarian workers to encourage and support them in deployments to the field?

5. What skills can be specifically promoted by humanitarian organizations to support Afghan women in overcoming some of the identified barriers?

The study is a qualitative enquiry and used semi-structured questionnaires to undertake KIIs with HR managers and gender coordinators, as well as senior programme managers from national and international NGOs and UN agencies in Afghanistan. Additionally, FGDs were organized with groups of women working with national and international NGOs and the UN, in five provinces of Afghanistan: Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar, and Nangarhar.

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the two primary areas of enquiry focused on the following:

1. Identifying barriers preventing recruitment of women in humanitarian organizations and the challenges responsible for attrition of women staff
2. Best practices and suggestions of strategies for promoting recruitment of women staff, and technical and other forms of support that agencies can provide to women humanitarian workers to improve retention rates.

A total of 14 KIIs and six FGDs were conducted, with more than 80 respondents, representing 43 national and international agencies as well as two agency coordinating networks, namely AWN and the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (ACBAR). Interviews with HR officials from various national and national NGOs, sometimes together with the gender coordinator or other senior rights-related staff, were mostly conducted online via Microsoft Team or Zoom.

FGDs were held physically in each of the five provinces included in the study sample and involved current or former Afghan women staff of national and international NGOs and UN agencies, with the researcher interacting with respondents in person. All FGDs in the provinces, were hosted by the UN Women sub-office. In Kabul, the FGD was hosted by the AWN, which is located in the centre of the city, and hence, more easily accessible to a majority of participants.

Though KIIs had been originally planned with UN agencies, that plan was changed in consultation with the HR Task Force. Instead, an FGD was held with participation of representatives from different UN agencies, who shared their experiences and views about barriers to women's recruitment and retention by UN agencies, and also shared best practices that had enabled their organizations to strengthen recruitment and retention of Afghan women staff.

Selection of FGD participants aimed to include a representative group of women from large and small local and international organizations, and the UN agencies. Participants were a mix of senior management, mid-management level and field staff to ensure all perspectives were heard to the extent possible. FGDs were held in the local languages dominant in each province to ensure inclusiveness. UN Women team members were present at each FGD, both as participants and observers.

The following sections describe the range of barriers faced by Afghan women aid workers brought up in the course of interviews as well as during FGDs with Afghan women humanitarian aid workers. The report also lists their recommendations for surmounting these barriers, as well as strategies that have worked in specific contexts and organizations, and which may be replicable.



CONTEXT IN AFGHANISTAN, AND WOMEN'S RECRUIT- MENT AND RETENTION IN HUMANITARIAN WORK

Afghanistan's struggle to recover from more than four decades of conflict has been fraught with a complex mix of challenges aggravated by a predominantly male-centric culture that allows Afghan women and girls limited avenues for development and growth to enable them to be contributing members of society. This effectively robs the country's development effort of nearly 50 percent of its human-resource potential. In the past two decades significant progress was made in the area of women's rights, with improved access to school and higher education, employment and inclusion of women and girls in leadership and decision-making roles in the community and political spheres. However, this tenuous growth and progress was abruptly halted after the takeover of the government by the Taliban in August 2021.

With the DfA taking control in August 2021, life for the Afghan population as a whole, and women in particular, experienced a dramatic backslide. Development, trade, commerce, education, health and human rights collectively took a downturn, and thousands of Afghans scrambled to flee the country, expecting negative consequences of the sudden and haphazard take-over of the political system and leadership.

In recent months, a number of restrictions have been slapped onto women; they are expected to wear full body covering *hijab* and to cover their faces (May 2022). Women may not travel beyond 70 kms by road without a male escort from a male family member (*mahram*), and need a mahram for air travel of any distance (December 2021).¹³

13 See for instance: Al Jazeera, No Long Distance Travel for Women Without a Male Escort, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/26/afghanistan-long-distance-travel-women-without-male-escort-taliban>

Women civil servants have been sent home until further notice with the exception of those working in public health and education (September 2021).¹⁴ Women are discouraged from visiting government offices for work, and are told to send a man instead. Schools for girls in grade seven and above have remained indefinitely closed,¹⁵ and women working with television media are expected to wear face coverings (19 May 2022).¹⁶

Through this series of progressively restrictive edicts on Afghan women,¹⁷ the DfA firmly and decisively silenced any voice of dissent that could question their edicts or demand rights or freedoms, robbing Afghan women of much of their agency and cowing them into compliance for fear of reprisals against them or other members of their families.

These restrictions also pose challenges for the delivery of humanitarian aid to women and girls, as conservative Afghan culture restricts access of men who are not family into households, including those of the needy populations.

With many qualified national staff from international agencies and UN fleeing the country or being evacuated in the early months after the takeover

14 See After a Year of Taliban Rule, Advances for Afghan Women and Youth Have All Evaporated, August 2022, available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/after-year-taliban-rule-advances-afghan-women-and-youth-have-all-evaporated>

15 Education Cluster, 2022 April, Situation Update: Back to School

16 Timeline of Taliban Restrictions of Women's Rights, Feminist, 2022, available at: <https://feminist.org/news/timeline-of-taliban-restrictions-of-womens-rights/>

17 <https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Talibans-restrictions-on-womens-rights-since-August-2021-updated-o822.pdf>

by the Taliban, including educated and qualified Afghan women and men, the country experienced a considerable brain drain.

The withdrawal or withholding of some foreign assistance has had serious consequences. The economic downturn was felt the most by women, who have also seen their participation in the economy decreasing, with women's employment falling as much as 28 percent from 2020 to July 2022.¹⁸ Unemployment and increasing poverty have exposed women and girls to increased domestic violence and neglect, already at high levels in Afghanistan before the DfA takeover. A 2021 poll of over 200 women's rights experts ranked Afghanistan as the [worst place in the world to be a woman](#).¹⁹ Since the take-over, violence against women and girls has been on the rise, in a context where support systems for women survivors of violence have been demolished.²⁰

Except for women working in health care or education sectors, all other women civil servants have been barred from their jobs until further notice, resulting in thousands of women suddenly ejected from the workforce, some of whom are sole breadwinners for their families.²¹

The impact of the conflict has been especially devastating for women and children, who make up 80 percent of newly displaced Afghans.²² According to a WFP report of May 2022, half the country's population (22.8 million) may face acute food insecurity, with millions facing imminent famine and acute malnutrition in 2022, a significant proportion of them pregnant and lactating women, and children.²³

National and international NGOs and UN agencies are still operating, but are faced with complex operational challenges, dealing with obstacles imposed

by unclear and restrictive policies of the DfA. Restrictions on women's movement without a male escort, dress codes and segregation of workspaces are mandated, and compliance expected. Owing to the funds they bring into the country, UN and international NGOs have some leeway for negotiation with the DfA.

According to a March 2022 study of challenges and barriers faced by women's NGOs and CSOs, women-led and women's rights organizations face the additional pressures of budget reductions and withdrawal of donor support at this critical juncture,²⁴ forcing them to downsize at a time when Afghan women more than ever, need to be reached and assisted. A full 77 percent of women-led CSOs interviewed had no projects in 2022.²⁵ Limits on fund withdrawals from bank accounts inside Afghanistan, and on receiving funds from outside the country since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, have posed additional barriers.²⁶ Women-led CSOs are disproportionately affected by funding constraints. Many smaller CSOs that implement income-generating projects also run the risk of suffering from the economic decline since August 2021, with fewer markets for their products.

Humanitarian aid distribution: Women participants in the FGDs stressed that, owing to the ultra-conservative cultures in many rural parts of Afghanistan, humanitarian aid distribution was also likely to be adversely affected where women aid workers are not present in the field. The role of women aid workers in Afghanistan is critical to "reaching and assessing the needs of women and girls and women-headed households," and their absence often "means that women with disabilities have less access to rehabilitative services."²⁷

18 UN Women, Gender Alert 2, August 2022, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Gender-alert-2-Womens-rights-in-Afghanistan-one-year-after-the-Taliban-take-over-en.pdf>

19 <https://www.amnestyusa.org/the-worlds-worst-places-to-be-a-woman/>

20 Afghanistan: Death in slow motion: Women and girls under Taliban rule, Amnesty International, July 2022, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/5685/2022/en/>

21 Ibid

22 <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/2229>

23 World Food Programme Afghanistan, Situation Report, 06 May 2022.

24 af-Research-on-Challenges-Barriers-Opportunities-women-CSOs_full-report_o

25 Ibid

26 Ibid

27 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/04/afghanistan-taliban-blocking-women-aid-workers>

KEY FINDINGS

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR AFGHAN WOMEN'S RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN HUMANITARIAN AID AGENCIES

Existing barriers prior to the August 2021 takeover

Personal, family and cultural barriers for women in humanitarian organizations:

A number of personal and family barriers and challenges for recruitment are common to most women aspiring to work with humanitarian aid organizations, as recounted by various respondents in the course of FGDs and interviews. Some of the most obvious include family and domestic obligations, childcare, and denial of permission to work by husband, in-laws, or parents.

- **More and stricter family restrictions**

Since the coming to power of the Taliban, restrictions on women from families have also increased. Families worry about women and girls going out, and about negative repercussions from the Taliban for the women themselves, and even for their families. The enforcement by the Taliban of the Hijab Decree forcing women to cover their faces when outside the house has also placed the responsibility of women covering up on their male family members, who are the ones to be punished if women do not respect the rule.²⁸ This has contributed to a dynamic where male family members feel accountable for the actions of women in their families. In addition, young women who get engaged or are newly married may face new restrictions imposed on their work or mobility from in-laws or their spouse.

28 <https://theprint.in/world/taliban-issue-decree-for-women-to-wear-burqa-in-afghanistan-violation-to-attract-punishment/946771/>

- **Domestic duties and resistance to women working outside**

Unlike men, women are expected to juggle domestic and work responsibilities in order to justify their work outside, which is a source of added stress. Some have had to fight for their right to study and work, sometimes at great personal and emotional cost even during the time of the Republic. One young woman participating in the FGD in Mazar described how, married at the age of 15, she was driven out of her home by her in-laws for insisting on continuing her education and wanting to work.²⁹

- **Absence of childcare or day-care facilities**

Since August 2021, childcare and day care facilities for preschool-aged children of working mothers have all closed down, in particular in the provinces.³⁰ This poses another barrier to working mothers of younger children.

29 Focus Group Discussion with Women Humanitarian Workers, Mazar-i-Sharif, June 2022

30 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

- **Negative perceptions of work environment**

A number of respondents, particularly in Kandahar and Nangarhar, said that families, particularly in the provinces, are of the view that **NGO and UN jobs are not appropriate for women**. They provide a work environment with mixing of men and women, which is considered Western culture, and therefore, not respectable for Afghan women. While this may have been a challenge in the past as well, the coming to power of the Taliban has further reinforced the perception from families and communities that humanitarian related work is inappropriate for women. Many women during provincial interactions in Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Herat said neighbours and communities in which they live raise eyebrows and question their activities. The common belief is that teaching, and medicine are the only two professions suited to women. As a result, many women or their families feel obliged to lie to neighbours and extended families and conceal the nature of their work.³¹ Some male family members may also consider the woman's place to be at home. Some participants in FGDs claimed only their husbands knew that they worked with NGOs.³²

One respondent summed up her opinion on the male attitude as, “the men of the family don’t like their women to get an education or earn because when they become literate, they become strong, and men don’t want that.” (FGD Nangarhar)

- **Lack of job skills and English-language proficiency**

Another challenge brought up by many respondents is the need for applicants to speak English and possess a set of complex skills to apply for positions. Women may not always speak English,

31 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

32 Ibid

which is a crucial barrier to their recruitment, particularly in international NGOs and UN agencies, where the competition for better-paid jobs is tough.³³ Respondents in FGD in provinces like Herat and Nangarhar believed there are many otherwise qualified women with experience of working in the humanitarian sector but who are not hired only because they do not speak English³⁴. In usually large Afghan families, women and girls typically have less access to opportunities and resources for education and skill building, compared to men and boys, who have more control over resources. As a result, many women in the provinces and even in Kabul are unable to supplement and enhance their formal public education by joining English-language or computer courses.

Moreover, sometimes educated women lack work experience in UN and international agencies, putting them at a disadvantage during the recruitment process. A number of respondents believed that prior work experience in international and UN agencies was sometimes needed to be selected for a job.³⁵

- **Lack of confidence**

Another personal barrier many women mentioned is their own lack of confidence in their capabilities.³⁶ Typically women have less access to higher education and training, and hence hold back from applying for jobs for fear of failure, or because they believe they would compare unfavourably with male applicants.

- **Lack of funds to go for interview**

Poverty and lack of access to funds may also be a barrier for women to pay for transport to go for an interview if selected.

33 Key Informant Interviews with Human Resource Focal Points, July 2022

34 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers, Herat and Nangarhar, June 2022

35 Key Informant Interviews with Human Resource Focal Points, July 2022

36 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

Barriers to recruitment of women employees

- **Fewer qualified women available for hire**

The exodus of qualified Afghans in the wake of the August 2021 takeover of Afghanistan created a shortage of qualified women applicants for humanitarian agencies, since many educated working women left the country for fear of the negative attitude towards women by the new group in power. Generally, international NGOs and UN seem better placed with appropriate gender equity policies and resources and funds. They can provide necessary benefits and support to attract women applicants and hire women for suitable jobs. However, while several organizations are striving for equity in numbers, most HR officials interviewed admitted they have had limited success finding women to fill leadership and technical positions.³⁷ There seem to be fewer challenges with finding women applicants for low-paid support staff positions such as cooks and cleaners, whereas the barriers were more significant for women in leadership positions

- **Local NGOs lack resources to offer benefits**

Local NGOs however, including many women NGOs, face a tougher fight. The fleeing of large numbers of educated professional women from Afghanistan has created a shortage of qualified women applicants in the pool. High demand enables available qualified women to find jobs with UN agencies and international NGOs. Local NGOs and smaller organizations with less funds cannot offer competitive salaries and benefits to recruit qualified women. Their limited benefits and lack of job security, due mostly to project-based recruitments, prevents them from attracting qualified applicants, specifically women, and retaining them beyond the life of the projects.

- **Complicated announcement and application processes**

Complicated job announcement and application process used by many international NGOs and UN agencies is a barrier to recruitment of women staff that came up repeatedly in the course of data

37 Key Informant Interviews with Human Resource Focal Points, July 2022

collection.³⁸ Jobs are typically announced on ACBAR and other local job sites, as well as on the organizations' own websites. Women with no access to a computer or the internet miss such opportunities. Many women unfamiliar with online applications, or without access to reliable internet connectivity, cannot apply for jobs that require an online application, even if they are otherwise qualified. With internet penetration at **22.9 percent**³⁹ of the total population in Afghanistan at the start of 2022, most women outside the capital Kabul lack access, or have only intermittent access to poor-quality connection.

- **Competition from male applicants**

According to respondents, women may face competition from male applicants who have often had access to more education and professional development opportunities.⁴⁰ Owing to limited family resources combined with a patriarchal culture that favours the male sex, women tend to have lower education backgrounds, and less or no work experience.⁴¹ During tests and interviews, women applicants are at a disadvantage, and may not be able to perform as well as men. They may also feel intimidated by all-male interview panels.

Moreover, women candidates are at a disadvantage even when recruiting through personal and professional networks, because they are less likely to be part of such networks.

- **Passive dissuasion of women's hire**

Some national and international NGOs passively discourage the recruitment of women. As mentioned by one staffer at an international NGO, sometimes programme managers, particularly in the provinces and in the field, are more focussed on getting the

38 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

39 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-afghanistan>

40 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

41 In 2022, 37% of women could read and write compared to 66% of men, see Women Education in Afghanistan After the Return of the Taliban, Grant, Farr, 2022, available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/04/23/women-education-in-afghanistan-after-the-return-of-the-taliban/>

job done, and consider it more expedient to hire a man than having to deal with the requirements and barriers faced by a women employee in the same position.⁴² While there may be gender equity policies and guidelines, in practical terms, they may be overlooked. Moreover, HR officers from national and international NGOs also mentioned the uncertainty around the possibility for women staff to continue working as a reason hampering their recruitment.⁴³ The possibility that the DfA would completely forbid women from working still seemed realistic to HR officers, who mentioned management of national and international NGOs sometimes hesitated to hire women. The risk that women staff may also leave the country in search of better opportunities and life conditions was also cited as a challenge for their recruitment.

While recruiters may toe the line with regard to gender equity policy requirements by ostensibly encouraging women to apply, they find legitimate technical and operational reasons to select a male candidate instead. Interview panels may fail to select a women applicant because she is obviously pregnant, or because she may need maternity leave, or have childcare needs. These are some of the tacit ways in which women applicants may be side-lined even where fair and rational gender equity policies exist in theory.

- **Sexual harassment and other risks**

A more serious issue of concern brought up by a few respondents involved **actual safety and security risk** to potential women applicants. A woman reported instances of receiving a call from one of the men on the interview panel requesting inappropriate favours of a sexual nature, in exchange for selection for the job. This made them decide never to apply to the organization again. Some women in Mazar talked about potentially risky spurious job sites inviting women applicants for jobs, and requiring a selfie to be sent with the application.⁴⁴ These are a

few alarming factors that may put women aspiring to jobs at risk, and discourage them from seeking employment with humanitarian agencies. Some women fear to share personal details required in job applications, for fear that their information may be shared with the DfA. These were some concerns brought up during the FGD in Mazar.

While preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) is a key priority of the humanitarian response,⁴⁵ a majority of working women are not aware of PSEA issues and do not know how to deal with them.

Barriers to retention of women staff

- **Opportunities for women staff in better-paying organizations**

Staff retention has been another important issue for most national and international NGOs, particularly significant in the past year owing to **exodus of qualified women** and men soon after the takeover of the country by the Taliban. However, that was not necessarily gender-specific; organizations lost both male and women staff to evacuations. Seeing as professionally qualified women were already in short supply, this dearth has created high demand and more opportunities for professional women who are still in Afghanistan. Multiple HR officials interviewed mentioned they had lost qualified women staff to better-paying positions in other organizations. Qualified women working with national NGOs are taken on by international NGOs and UN agencies for higher salaries and benefits, which local NGOs cannot compete with. Even some international NGOs said they lost several qualified women staff in the past 12 months due to job opportunities opening up in the UN.

45 A PSEA taskforce was established in 2016 by the HCT for Afghanistan, and PSEA is a key component of the humanitarian response plan for 2022

42 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

43 Focus Group Discussion with ACBAR HR Working Group, August 2022

44 Focus Group Discussion with Women Humanitarian Workers, Mazar-i-Sharif, June 2022

- **Less support for local women and women-led NGOs and CSOs**

Diminishing support for local NGOs and CSOs, in particular, women and women-led organizations, came up as an important challenge for recruitment of women in humanitarian aid work. Many women's organizations, due to the nature of their work, also had more women staff before the DfA takeover, and have thus been more impacted by the exodus of women following the takeover. Local and grassroots agencies are potential employers for humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan. However, in the past 12 months donor support for them, particularly women's and women-led organizations, has been drying up. As a result, many small NGOs and CSOs are struggling to survive, and have been forced to downsize to the bare minimum staff, releasing much of their existing staff.⁴⁶

- **Women's contribution undervalued**

Some women felt that the negative attitude of men in leadership was also a barrier at times.⁴⁷ Women lose interest in their jobs and are demotivated when their expertise and contributions are not valued or acknowledged, and they are assigned progressively less relevant and useful roles within the organization. This issue was brought up by multiple women in the course of FGDs and during informal discussions in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, and Kandahar.⁴⁸ Often these decisions are justified as measures to protect women staff. At times women also mentioned a pressure from male colleagues for women staff to resign. A specific case cited during unstructured discussions was that a women staff member was reportedly pressurized to resign by her INGO management, and a male staff member

46 Challenges, Barriers and Opportunities for Women CSOs in the Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis, GiHA WG Afghanistan 2022, available at: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/af-Research-on-Challenges-Barriers-Opportunities-women-CSOs_full-report_o.pdf

47 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

48 Ibid

was recruited in her place.⁴⁹ Without more women in leadership and decision-making roles, the expectations and perspectives of women staff tend to be ignored and they feel unheard, and are ultimately driven to resign.

- **Insecure and project-based job**

Lack of job security is another barrier. Local NGOs also typically release project staff at the end of projects, due to the nature of project-based funding, and thus fail to retain qualified and experienced women staff. Most small CSOs and grassroots organizations, which have been struggling to stay afloat and relevant, are on the brink of closing down due to lack of donor support and difficult conditions imposed by local authorities. As qualified women staff are in short supply, it becomes difficult for smaller CSOs to retain them.

- **Lack of professional and mentorship support**

Some HR officials were of the opinion that **work pressures** also posed a barrier to retention of women staff when women are recruited in positions of responsibility.⁵⁰ In the absence of mentorship support and encouragement, women employees may feel overwhelmed by the expectations from their role while having to combine it with their numerous domestic tasks, and feel pushed to resign.

- **Lack of family support**

Women with many family responsibilities sometimes find it difficult to continue in a professional capacity due to the **absence of family support**. Childcare, elderly care and other familial obligations sometimes pose barriers for them to continue having a career, while their family may not support their work outside the house.

49 Ibid

50 Key Informant Interviews with Human Resource Focal Points, July 2022

- **Mental health issues**

With the current restrictions in place and lack of clarity on their enforcement, women face highly stressful situations in their day to day lives. The negative stressors on their lives may result in mental health issues for Afghan women, which can in turn make it difficult for some of them to retain their jobs. According to a recent report published by HealthNet TPO at least half the people living in Afghanistan suffer from psychological distress.⁵¹ Women are likely to have many such unaddressed issues.

Other barriers include **limited opportunities for professional development and career growth, absence of childcare and breastfeeding facilities, low pay and lack of job security.**

Specific barriers posed by the DfA take-over since August 2021

- **Women civil servants out of work**

The leadership change in the country has severely restricted opportunities for women to participate in public life, with increasingly stringent controls imposed on their rights to education, gainful employment, mobility and travel, and even on the way they dress. Thousands of **women previously working in government ministries have been rendered jobless**, and have been instructed to await further notice, or to send their family members in their stead.⁵² School education beyond primary school has been halted for girls.⁵³ While most respondents felt they had the support of their family to work, particularly in Kabul and the big cities, others said families supported them and needed the income, but were anxious because of the current situation.

51 <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/supporting-mental-health-afghanistan#:~:text=One%20in%20two%20people%20living,homes%2C%20possessions%20and%20loved%20ones>

52 See After a Year of Taliban Rule, Advances for Afghan Women and Youth Have All Evaporated, August 2022, available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/after-year-taliban-rule-advances-afghan-women-and-youth-have-all-evaporated>

- **Need for mahram for women field workers**

The **mahram requirement** established by the DfA poses multiple challenges for women field workers. According to respondents, women who do not have a male family member to accompany them cannot go on work missions, which may discourage them from applying for field jobs, or force them to resign. While most international agencies included in the study seem to have provisions for supporting **mahram** costs for women field workers, national organizations often lack adequate funding to cover this need.

Sometimes the availability of a **mahram** is also a barrier. Male family members may have jobs or education obligations, which would be neglected meaning they would lose their own earnings or learning if they had to accompany women during field work missions. Other related barriers are lack of, or low **mahram** costs offered, or inadequate accommodation and other facilities for **mahram** during overnight fieldwork missions, which are disincentives for the accompanying men. Some women in provinces said the men at times find it embarrassing to accompany their women family members on work missions.⁵⁴

- **Additional needs of women staff**

Linked to various decrees and directives by the DfA, new requirements for working women also pose barriers. The DfA have for instance made announcements towards the need to separate workspaces between men and women. These are sometimes implemented with random spot checks carried out by the DfA which has led a number of NGOs and to comply with this new requirement. However, less resourced national NGOs often do not have budgets for **mahram** cost or childcare facilities, separate workspaces, or safe transport, even for field workers, which are barriers to both recruitment and retention of staff. In some instances, it is indeed seen as more economical to recruit a man instead of a woman.

53 Education Cluster, 2022 April, Situation Update: Back to School

54 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

- **Fear of harassment at Taliban checkpoints**

Fear of being stopped and questioned at security checkpoints, and possible reprisal from the DfA, also were recurrently mentioned as barriers.⁵⁵ Under the new leadership, women are afraid because there is no clarity about how the local authorities at checkpoints may react.⁵⁶ The mandatory dress code and the need for a *mahram* ere also listed as barriers. Many unmarried or widowed women do not have a male family member, or one who can accompany them when they go to work in field sites. This limits their ability to function in positions that require travel outside the office.

- **Inability to communicate with DfA**

The DfA's unwillingness to communicate or have meetings with women national employees of national and international NGOs has made some senior and liaison positions out-of-reach for women, because they require regular interaction with the local authorities in power. The local authorities continue to intimidate and insult women humanitarian workers. A women staff member of a local NGO in Mazar for instance shared in an FGD how she tried to attend a provincial coordination meeting, but was humiliated and asked to leave the meeting⁵⁷.

“As the head of my organization, I went to attend the meeting at the provincial directorate, in proper hijab and face cover. On entering the meeting room, I found I was the only woman among a group of male attendees. The Talib official chairing the meeting asked me why I had come. He told me to send a man, and asked me to leave without looking at me.” (One FGD participant in Mazar)

55 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022

56 Ibid

57 Focus Group Discussion with Women Humanitarian Workers, Mazar-i-Sharif, June 2022

Some small to medium-sized (in terms of reach and budget) women-led women's organizations were asked to recruit a man so that they can have communication with the authorities.⁵⁸ Taliban in the de-facto ministries are generally less cooperative towards local agencies, in particular women-led or women's rights organizations.

- **Negative change in attitudes of male colleagues**

A fair proportion of respondents during the provincial discussions felt that **men in Afghanistan do not accept a women supervisor** or director.⁵⁹ In their opinion, a number of men would dislike working under the leadership of a woman, which poses an additional barrier to women's leadership in the humanitarian response. As opined by a male HR officer in Kabul, a qualified young woman is not accepted by senior Afghan staff as ageism and sexism are pervasive. Respondents acknowledged that most men have on the surface, did comply with the policy of women empowerment and inclusion in the political environment of the last two decades before the resurgence of the Taliban. But many also said they suspected that, in a society rooted in patriarchy and male dominance, and in the current misogynistic environment, men feel more justified and freer to discourage women. Several women respondents in FGDs expressed the feeling that attitudes of male colleagues towards them have changed since the DfA takeover of August 2021. They tend to be bossy and overbearing toward women employees, and discredit and disrespect their professional contributions. There is a general feeling of mistrust, and several respondents suspected that male panellists in job interviews actively sought to discourage recruitment of women applicants and posed tough questions to make them fail.⁶⁰

Some respondents reported that their male colleagues were reluctant to travel with women colleagues to the field, possibly for fear of repercussions at checkpoints.

58 Focus Group Discussion with Women Humanitarian Workers, Kabul, June 2022

59 Ibid

60 Focus Group Discussions with Women Humanitarian Workers in Five Provinces of Afghanistan, June 2022



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- **Negative attitude of communities**

Women working with communities experience similar rejection and hostility from male community leaders and members.⁶¹ This creates an inhospitable work environment, forcing women to leave their jobs. Men in their own communities, whether at work, at home, or in and around their homes have become less tolerant to women’s activities outside the home. During an FGD held in Kandahar, a woman participant even mentioned that “even male vendors refuse to sell to us (women) now.”⁶²

The above barriers notwithstanding, there is an acute need for women humanitarian workers, given

the unravelling humanitarian situation in the country. And there is a renewed focus on recruitment and retaining of women staff by many national and international NGOs as well as UN agencies, who are putting in place different policies and strategies to maximize the participation of Afghan women in humanitarian action, and to counter the limitations imposed by the DfA.

The following sections will describe some successful strategies that have been adopted by various international agencies and some useful recommendations made by various respondents, including HR officials, gender officers, and Afghan women aid workers.

61 Ibid

62 Focus Group Discussion with Women Humanitarian Workers, Kandahar, June 2022

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN STAFF: EXISTING GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Through primary data collection, this report has strived to map existing practices which have enabled the recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers. Women humanitarian workers are essential for an inclusive humanitarian response, and women's right to work as well as gender parity is also at the core of many organizations, including the UN which has set up a gender parity strategy to ensure the presence of women staff at all levels of the organization.⁶³ While many national NGOs and CSOs with limited geographic scope and small budgets are barely surviving as best they can, and are unable to offer women employees even the minimum incentives, international NGOs and UN agencies are assigning special focus on promoting recruitment and retention of women employees and are better placed to accommodate emerging requirements. Efforts range from the bare minimum of encouraging qualified women to apply, to reviewing organizational recruitment policies, strategies, and benefits for women employees, with the intent to maximize opportunities for women to work in the humanitarian aid sector.

There is an intensified effort to understand challenges and barriers faced by women in the workforce,

and to increase participation of Afghan women in humanitarian action through providing incentives for increased recruitment and retention. Some good practices mentioned during interactions with various agency staff are described below.

- **Diverse job announcement channels:** Jobs announced in a combination of diverse ways have more chance of reaching women applicants. In addition to announcing jobs on usual online platforms, positions specifically targeting women are disseminated through informal interagency networking of HR officials and internal announcements; head-hunting is also practised. For field positions and lower-tier jobs, printed announcements in the local languages are made accessible by posting print versions locally in public places such as relevant district offices, clinics, and other much-frequented places. The application process is simplified, not requiring computerized or online applications, to enable more women to apply. Hiring couples (mostly husband and wife, but sometimes maybe brother and sister) has been effective for recruiting field staff and enabling women to be employed.

63 <https://reform.un.org/content/gender-parity-strategy>

- **Entry level programmes:** Internships for fresh graduates with no prior work experience was cited by many respondents as one of the most successful ways of providing educated women with an avenue to enter the workforce. UNOPS boasts a dedicated programme, which has contributed to achieving its gender equity targets. They have inducted young graduates into the agency as interns with mentorship oversight provided in various areas of work, so that they become familiar with the systems and work environment and learn job skills that will enable them to apply for positions that open up in the UN system over time. Other UN agencies and several international NGOs are considering starting internship programmes for women, or already have them running the **UNV programme:** The UNV programme is also an important contributor to inducting junior Afghan women into the UN system and preparing them for further job openings.
- **Gender reviews of staff recruitment data and target setting:** Regular periodic reviews of staff recruitment data can provide useful insights about gender parity concerns and prompt action.

The Agha Khan Development Network uses a combination of different strategies, such as having regular reviews of staff data, to see how many women staff there are at different levels of staffing, and setting gender equity targets for different units, sectors, and regions. When a woman staff leaves the organization, efforts are made to replace her with another woman.

- **Only-for-women positions:** Announcing 'only-for-women' positions is another strategy that has had some positive results. This is done by some international NGOs in Afghanistan such as the IRC.
- **Offering taxi fares to shortlisted women candidates:** Providing a taxi fare enables women candidates to come for interviews, which could be a financial barrier for some.
- **Positive discrimination:** Practising positive discrimination in favour of women candidates during qualifying tests and interviews for recruitment, and selecting a woman candidate over a male competitor if they are both equally competent, or even if the man is slightly better qualified, have all proved to be effective.
- **Diversifying interview panels:** By ensuring that interview panels include at least one woman, women applicants' comfort level and confidence is enhanced during the interview process, improving their chances of selection.
- **Offering and advertising generous incentives:** Another strategy is to offer generous incentives and benefits for women in keeping with their specific needs, and to advertise these benefits. This encourages more women to apply. Paid maternity leave, childcare support and flexible work hours for breastfeeding mothers and those with children below school age, allows women to work more comfortably. Other benefits which are now necessary and enable women to work are adequate *mahram* allowances and suitable accommodation for couples, and other facilities for work-related travel.
- **Office jobs and flexible work modalities for women:** As travel is a new barrier for women staff, some agencies are trying to increase recruitment of women by offering office jobs to women applicants. Some international NGOs even accommodate a combination of work modalities for their women staff where possible, so that they can work from home when necessary. BBC Media Action for instance set up a programme for freelancers working remotely, where they have encouraged women to apply.
- **Safe transport:** Safe transport for pick up and drop off ensure security and comfort of women staff. Some organizations like the IRC go so far in their protection and duty of care as to instruct women staff who are stopped by Taliban to refer them to communicate with their office.
- **Safe and respectful work environment:** Safety and protection of women staff have become vital for most humanitarian agencies, and they are reviewing their policies to ensure adequate mechanisms are in place to provide a safe and

respectful work environment to women and men. Segregated workspaces for women staff are provided by many international NGOs. While this may not be ideal, it is seen as a necessity to comply with the Taliban edict, so that women can continue to have jobs, and so that the organizations can continue to operate.

- **Role of gender officers:** In some national and international NGOs and UN agencies, gender units and gender officers can have inputs into, and raise gender concerns regarding recruitment and staff orientation cycles. Staff awareness sessions are held at Kabul and provincial levels about gender policy, professional codes of conduct, and zero tolerance for sexual harassment or gender-based discrimination. Complaints and response mechanisms are introduced. Some agencies such as Save the Children have encouraged formation of women staff associations to foster mutual support and sisterhood, and even offer psychosocial support to staff, as needed. Safety outside the office is also considered.
- **Negotiations with the DfA:** International agencies are in regular communication with the DfA to prevent disruption of activities or harassment of staff on mission, in particular of women staff. While the decrees regarding limits on movement of women are countrywide, the protocols expected by security personnel vary from place to place and individual to individual at different checkpoints. International agencies and the UN are in ongoing dialogue with local and national authorities, in particular with officials from the de facto Ministry of Vice and Virtue, to facilitate unhindered access of women staff to work sites. While the authorities generally cooperate, they are reluctant to provide any clarification in writing. Decrees are interpreted differently in different parts of the country, which may pose issues with implementation. A few international organizations have thus found that, instead of seeking countrywide permissions, negotiating with local authorities on different modalities as the need arises has worked well for them. One such organization that has navigated communication with the Taliban authorities with relative success is the IRC. For instance, for women field workers without a *mahram* in a particular project site, it was possible to negotiate a different solution where two women colleagues could travel together to the field, in place of being

accompanied by a *mahram*. It was deemed easier if one of them was an older woman.

- **Internal promotions and on-job capacity development:** To retain women staff, and to ensure their inclusion at mid-level and senior-management level for which it may be more difficult to recruit externally, effective methods are internal promotions and professional advancement opportunities. On-the-job capacity development for women employees, through mentorships, formal training, and distance learning and online higher education support, has proved useful incentives for retaining women staff and also for building a qualified workforce. Some large international NGOs offer learning and development opportunities to staff members of both sexes through short and long professional courses on topics such as report writing and data management, and even support higher education opportunities. The organizations cover a significant share of the cost of such training for women staff. Several agencies offer free English-language and computer classes within the office, since these are skills needed for professional and career advancement.

Recommendations

As stated in the recent analytical brief published by the European Institute of Peace in June 2022: "Humanitarian organizations will need to consider exceptional measures to counter the impact of the Taliban's harsh policies in ensuring that aid reaches the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society, and to guarantee that nobody is left behind."⁶⁴ This is vital, both in terms of ensuring access to the most in need groups including women-headed families, disabled women, and orphans, as well as to ensure that the relevance and contributions of women in Afghanistan are not completely undermined. With women almost completely barred from working in government offices, humanitarian actors have a critical role to play in ensuring that women remain engaged in essential services, and that their professional potential is not lost. The following are some specific recommendations coming from this study.

64 EIP Analytical Brief – Afghanistan Brief No. 1: Women's Access to Humanitarian Aid

Advocacy with the DfA

With most humanitarian aid for Afghanistan coming through the UN and international NGOs, the DfA have no choice but to remain engaged with them, and to make allowances to enable them to operate. Afghan women and local organizations believe the periodic statements published by the UN in support of the rights of Afghan women to participate in education and employment are ineffective and inadequate to prompt any change; there is need for more concerted and assertive advocacy by the UN and international partners and donors to pressure the DfA into allowing women to function with more freedom and agency. UN agencies and international NGOs should persist in negotiating with, and collectively pressure the DfA, in particular the de facto Ministry of Vice and Virtue, to facilitate reasonable allowances and freedoms for women to take up useful employment, in particular in the humanitarian aid sector with both national and international agencies. The DfA need to understand the importance of women humanitarian workers, and allow safe and unhindered access to communities in need.

Without women humanitarian aid workers in the field, need assessments and aid distribution risk being inequitable, and missing some of the most vulnerable groups in need such as women-headed households, disabled women, the elderly, widows and children of widows.

Recommendations for recruitment processes

- **Develop simpler and diversified recruitment processes:** One recommendation specifically for UN agencies and international organizations is to simplify the recruitment process so that it is accessible to more women applicants. Many technically qualified women previously employed in government agencies are still in the country, and many educated women freshly out of university are looking for work experience. Job announcements should be published using multiple methods rather than just online, for instance through announcements in public places or through advertisement in the radio and on TV. Physical, hard-copy announcements disseminated through professional and personal networks in public places such as universities, local government offices, such as the district education office, public health and maternal health clinics, have proven efficient. Finally, application processes should be simplified so that talented women with limited access to computers and internet can also apply.
- **Build transparent recruitment procedures:** UN agencies, and national and international NGOs need to make their recruitment process more transparent and responsive to women candidates, to instil trust and confidence in them.
- **Eliminating or relaxing English-language requirements** for roles where English is not essential is another way to make job applications more accessible, and to provide more chances to otherwise qualified women who may not be very proficient in English. While this may not be feasible in the UN and International agencies, it can be adopted by local agencies, and English-language skills can be learned on the job.
- **Ensure expectations from women applicants are reasonable and realistic** during selection interviews and tests. Questions in selection tests and interviews should be adjusted to the realities of women candidates, to promote confidence and success for women with potential, and a positive attitude toward learning and development on the job. Positive discrimination in favour of women candidates is already being practised during recruitment by some international NGOs, and needs to be further reinforced and adopted widely, making it integral to recruitment policies. The presence of at least one, and preferably more women on the interview panel is recommended to inspire confidence among women candidates and could be adopted at policy level.
- **Recruit women in senior decision-making positions** so that women's issues are understood and addressed effectively. This may be done through capacity building and internal promotions of women staff.

- **Mentor new women leaders**, for instance through linking them with seasoned Afghan women leaders who left the country but are willing to support and strengthen new women leaders and decision makers.
- **Set up paid internship programmes** to include more women into the workforce. Many fresh university graduates seeking jobs do not qualify due to lack of work experience or experience in a specific sector. Internships need to be built into the design of all programmes implemented by local and international NGOs and UN agencies. These could include part-time internships for young women who are still studying. Announcing internship programmes and other opening-level opportunities at local universities will also ease access to internships for young women aspirants.
- **Set and achieve gender-parity recruitment targets:** Explicit gender parity targets need to be set by humanitarian aid agencies for recruitment of women staff in different departments and at different levels. While many agencies and organizations have set these targets, regular reviews are rarely undertaken to track progress and success in achieving targets, or to revise strategies to ensure progress. One respondent stressed that *gender parity targets should even be required of implementing partners* by international NGOs and UN agencies, and continuation of partnerships conditioned on demonstrated efforts to achieve them. Another mentioned that gender parity could be included in the key performance indicators of national and international NGOs and UN leadership to hold management accountable for the recruitment and retention of women staff.

Recommendations for retention of women staff

- **Promote a safe and respectful work environment:** Humanitarian aid agencies need to ensure they have clear policies and mechanisms to protect the dignity and comfort of all employees, and to prevent any discrimination or disrespect based on gender. Regular awareness sessions about

professional code of conduct should be organized for all staff to sensitize them to harmful and unacceptable behaviours of men toward their women colleagues, with consequences set for any breaches of conduct. Gender and protection cells should be established, and complaints and response mechanisms put in place. All staff should be expected to attend mandatory PSEA awareness sessions, in collaboration with the PSEA taskforce.

- **Promote women staff associations** to ensure there is a space for women to discuss and build support between women staff. If acknowledged within the organizations' structures, these associations can raise key issues pertaining to women staff, both with the organization's leadership and HR.
- **Guarantee reasonable benefits and facilities and include these in all submissions for donors funding:** These include benefits for women employees such as maternity leave, maternity allowance, childcare support, and safe transport as needed. For positions that require travel, *mahram* costs, safe travel, accident cover for staff and *mahram*, and safe and adequate accommodation, as well as childcare cost if necessary, should be provided. Where it helps, couple hiring has also proved helpful in recruitment and retention of women staff. Flexible work modalities and work hours for women staff should also be considered as needed.
- **Build ongoing dialogue and negotiation with the DfA both** through the humanitarian aid sector collectively, and by agencies individually, to stress the need for women aid workers, and to protect staff from harassment at the hands of local authorities or at security checkpoints. Meetings should be organized with local authorities and national level ministries to voice concerns, and to try to secure written permits.
- **Raise awareness among communities**, including male community members and leaders who may be averse to women aid workers. Budgets should be assigned for safeguarding activities, forums and committees and key messages disseminated in communities affected by emergencies.

- **Raise awareness among organizations' staff, including male staff members, and fight stereotypes within organizations**, which prevent women from being recruited or retained in certain positions that are seen as the exclusive domain of men (e.g., engineering, construction)
- **Increasing professional development opportunities** particularly for women staff, must be made integral to organizational development, and intensive advocacy with donors and partners to support it is needed. Mentorships, formal training workshops, and even online higher education opportunities should be facilitated for women working in the humanitarian aid sector. Professional capacity development leading to improved performance and promotions within the organization will support retention of qualified women. Capacity development initiatives by the UN and ACBAR should be revived and restarted to benefit women employees of less resourced and smaller national NGOs and CSOs. Since English-language and computer skills were mentioned by many respondents as major barriers to the career advancement of women staff, ongoing English and computer courses should be facilitated for staff aspiring to promotions.
- **Increase women's space in leadership and succession planning** to create a safe and friendly work environment for women employees, as women in discussions often highlighted that other women could best understand their issues and concerns. Afghan women staff should be groomed for and included in succession plans, so that they can aspire to and achieve positions of leadership within organizations. This can be done by appointing women deputies to each leadership position so that they can learn from their supervisor and fill more senior positions that open up.

As one respondent said, humanitarian *“organizations should not treat women the way the DfA does – we take decisions in consultations with women so that they are part of the decision making.”*

Recommendations for support of local women-led NGOs and CSOs

- **Forge stronger collaboration with local NGOs and CSOs** to preserve the agency of Afghan women and make them relevant contributors to the process of alleviating poverty and marginalization. It is vital that local NGOs, CSOs and Community Development Councils be revived and sustained, so that the agency and work capital of Afghan women can be preserved.
- **Sustain local CSOs and NGOs through advocacy, provision of small grants and partnering with them in humanitarian action.** A variety of synergies can be built between local and international agencies and the UN, which would prove mutually beneficial, and contribute to increased engagement of women in humanitarian aid activities. To enable smaller and women-led NGOs to benefit, the UN could lower its qualifying criteria for partner organizations. Providing flexible small grants to grassroots CSOs for vocational training, advocacy activities, and education courses, or partnering with local women CSOs in field monitoring work,⁶⁵ are some examples of synergies.
- **Undertaking collective advocacy with donors and partners** is needed so that local and women NGOs can have active roles in the humanitarian aid sector, and can attract and retain qualified women by offering reasonable remuneration, benefits and facilities. Agency networks such as ACBAR can initiate advocacy dialogues with the DfA, to allow such local organizations to function and contribute to job creation.
- **Work with local NGOs and CSOs as implementing partners** at field level to ensure the sustainability and survival of these organizations and contribute to their organizational capacity. It will also allow for recruitment of semi-skilled women field workers and monitors in larger numbers by these organizations. Professional capacity-building initiatives for women can be provided by local CSOs through partner funding, so that better-qualified women apply for jobs in the humanitarian sector, and have stronger chances of being hired.

65 af-Research-on-Challenges-Barriers-Opportunities-women-CSOs_full-report_o

- **Revive women's coalitions and networks** like the AWN to provide employment and capacity development support to Afghan women aspiring to jobs and employment. They can offer English-language and computer literacy, as well as programme planning and administrative skills training for educated women to improve their chances of recruitment. They can even assist with head hunting by creating rosters of qualified women to be matched with positions that open up in international NGOs and UN agencies, as well as in local NGOs, or by holding job fairs where women job aspirants can meet with prospective employers from the humanitarian sector.
- **Build the capacity of local NGOs and CSOs** to enable them to access and retain partnerships

and donor funding, and contribute effectively to humanitarian action. The revival of ACBAR's Capacity Development initiative funded by Japan Partners, the UN Environment Programme and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom will be very relevant to this effect. Some respondents opined that local agencies should also be supported to offer **alternative education opportunities** for women and girls. Women's organizations can provide informal high school-level and skills-based education to girl students whose education has been interrupted in the past two years. This would allow those girls to continue to improve their academic capabilities, and would develop a competent and well educated cadre of women to work in the humanitarian sector in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive mapping of the existing challenges and barriers to the recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers, across the UN, national and international NGOs and CSOs. It confirms and corroborates the findings of the March 2022 study, also undertaken by the GiHA) working group, on *Challenges, Barriers, and Opportunities for Women led CSOs in the Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis*,⁶⁶ and reinforces the Recommendations on Women's Representation, Relevance, and Recruitment following the UN Country Team gathering on strategic reflections of 7 June 2022.⁶⁷ The findings of this study have reaffirmed the need for taking urgent steps to increase and enhance the recruitment and retention of Afghan women in the humanitarian aid sector. In the context of the alarming poverty indicators, losing access to half the employable population does not make economic sense.

The study also highlights existing good practices that have the potential to be scaled up by various agencies across the country, as well as recommendations to take these forward and implement them across the board. As shown in the study, steps can and should be taken to encourage more women to apply for jobs with humanitarian agencies by offering attractive packages and making application processes more accessible. Recruitment processes should be adjusted to promote success for women applicants to ensure gender equity in hiring at all levels, and facilities to grow professionally provided on the job in a supportive, respectful and safe work environment.

Last but not the least, support and revival of local NGOs, CSOs and women-led groups as partners and implementers can help create more job openings for Afghan women, and build their capacity to contribute to a more inclusive humanitarian response.

66 <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/06/women-led-csos-in-the-afghanistans-humanitarian-crisis>

67 2022.06.07 Strategic Reflections on Women's Representation

ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Key informant interview tools

Key informant interview guide: Programme leadership / HR Managers of national and international NGO with significant engagement

Note: Some key informants will know, and have more detail than others. For those not providing direct service or technical support, ask the high-level categories (policy, services, etc.)

Introduction: Introduce self and explain the purpose of the study about barriers to recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers in Afghanistan. Ask if they have any initial questions and proceed.

Questions under each objective:

1. What barriers (personal, familial, social) prevent women from seeking employment with humanitarian organizations?

What in your opinion are the most important barriers to more women seeking and getting employment with humanitarian agencies? In what ways are these barriers different in different geographic areas?

2. To what extent do hiring managers / teams struggle to attract qualified women candidates and why (e.g., lack of applicants, low qualifications, unwillingness to travel)? for which specific sectors and type of jobs?

What is the male-women ratio of staff in your organization? Do you think women find it more difficult to get jobs in organizations such as this? Why do you think more women may not be able to get jobs in your organization? What kind of job vacancies get the lowest number of women applicants? Why?

3. Once women are hired, to what extent is retention of the same staff an issue and what are the common reasons for attrition?

How many Afghan women staff members from your organization have left their jobs in the past 12 months? Is the percentage similar to attrition

of male staff? What have been some of the most common reasons for women staff dropping out of their jobs in your organization? Is the situation different for women working in the urban and rural areas? Office and field workers?

4. How has the above changed since August 2021, and why?

How have the political changes since August 2021 affected women employment in your organization? Is it different for male staff?

Identifying methods for promoting recruitment and retention of women humanitarian staff

5. What methods can humanitarian agencies employ to maximize applications by qualified women staff (e.g., in use of specific job search platforms, in-person networks, formulation of job vacancy announcements)? How would these methods vary according to location and skill level?

How does your office normally announce job vacancies? In your opinion, what can organizations like this one do to increase the number of applications from qualified women for jobs? In addition to your usual channel for recruitment, how else can information about opportunities reach potential qualified women applicants? What could your office do to adjust your strategy to reach out to larger numbers of women applicants?

6. What reasonable adjustments can be applied during recruitment cycles to mitigate gendered barriers⁶⁸ to recruitment and to promote equitable outcomes in recruitment (e.g., lowering of qualification requirements, removal or adjustment of testing procedures, adjustment of interview procedures and questions)?

Given the limitations preventing women from applying for jobs, how can the recruitment process be adjusted so that there is a higher chance of success for women applicants, and so that staffing can be made more balanced in terms of gender? Can you share any successful strategies that have worked for your organization?

7. What specific incentives can humanitarian agencies provide to encourage applications by women and increase retention of women staff? For example, provisions for mahram, women-specific transport options, or subsidies.

Does your organization provide any special facilities to women staff, in view of the barriers they face? Given the issues you brought up earlier regarding retention of women staff, what more can humanitarian organizations do to provide a supportive work environment for women staff to promote their retention, and so that they can contribute optimally in their roles?

8. What reasonable adjustments should be provided to women humanitarian workers to encourage and support them in deployments to the field?

What do humanitarian agencies need to do to ensure the safety and comfort of women workers in the field, so that more women feel confident and willing to work in the field? What does your organization do to encourage women to work in the field?

9. What skills can be specifically promoted by humanitarian organizations to support Afghan women overcoming some of the identified barriers?

What kinds of capacity support can organizations offer to women staff so that they can overcome some of the barriers, and continue to work productively and safely with humanitarian

agencies? What else can improve the work environment for women staff in humanitarian agencies?

Anything else you might like to add?

Key informant interview guide: UN agencies

Introduction: Introduce self and explain the purpose of the study about barriers to recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers in Afghanistan. Ask if they have any initial questions and proceed.

1. Please tell me about the work your organization does, and where in Afghanistan it is operating. What areas of humanitarian aid does your organization support? Does it have any direct interventions, or does it support implementing partners? Which organizations do you partner with?

Questions under each objective:

2. What barriers (personal, familial, social) prevent women from seeking employment with humanitarian organizations?

What in your opinion are the most important barriers to more women seeking and getting employment with humanitarian agencies? In what ways are these barriers different in different geographic areas?

3. To what extent do hiring managers / teams struggle to attract qualified women candidates and why (e.g., lack of applicants, low qualifications, unwillingness to travel)? For which specific sectors and type of jobs?

What is the male-women ratio of staff in your organization? How many of your women staff are Afghan nationals? Why do you think this is so? What kind of job vacancies get the lowest number of women applicants? What could be possible reasons? At what levels is it more difficult to recruit women staff? Why?

4. Once women are hired, to what extent is retention of the same staff an issue and what are the common reasons for attrition?

How many Afghan women staff members from your organization have left their jobs in the past 12 months? Before August 2021? Is the percentage similar to attrition of male staff? What have been some of the most common reasons for women staff dropping out of their jobs in your organization? Is the situation different for women working in the urban and rural areas? Office and field workers?

5. How has the above changed since August 2021, and why?

How have the political changes in Afghanistan since August 2021 impacted Afghan women employment in your organization? Is it different for male staff? How has it affected staffing of your local and international partners in Afghanistan? How has it affected women staff retention?

Identifying methods for promoting recruitment and retention of women humanitarian staff

1. What methods can humanitarian agencies employ to maximize applications by qualified women staff (e.g., in use of specific job search platforms, in-person networks, formulation of job vacancy announcements)? How would these methods vary according to location and skill level?

In your opinion, what can UN agencies do to increase the number of applications from qualified women for jobs? In addition to your usual channel for recruitment, how else can information about opportunities reach potential qualified women applicants? What could your office do to adjust your strategy to reach out to larger pool of qualified women applicants (technical and field level)? What policy adjustments can be made in the recruitment processes?

2. What reasonable adjustments can be applied during recruitment cycles to mitigate gendered barriers to recruitment and to promote equitable outcomes in recruitment (e.g., lowering of qualification requirements, removal or adjustment of testing procedures, adjustment of interview procedures and questions)?

Given the limitations preventing Afghan women from applying for jobs, how can the recruitment

process be adjusted so that there is a higher chance of success for women applicants, and so that staffing can be made more balanced in terms of gender? Can you cite any best practices this organization or others in a similar context may have used successfully? Can you give specific suggestion for UN agencies, and for local and international implementing partners in Afghanistan?

3. What specific incentives can humanitarian agencies provide to encourage applications by women and increase retention of women staff? For example, provisions for mahram, women-specific transport options, or subsidies.

Does your organization provide any special facilities to local women staff, in view of the barriers they face? Given the issues brought up earlier regarding retention of women staff and the current situation in the country, what policy-level changes do humanitarian organizations need to provide a supportive work environment for women staff to promote their retention, and so that they can contribute optimally in their roles both in central and provincial offices, as well as at field level?

4. What reasonable adjustments should be provided to women humanitarian workers, to encourage and support them in deployments to the field?

What do humanitarian agencies need to do to ensure the safety and comfort of women workers in the field, so that more women feel confident and willing to work in the field and directly with communities?

5. What skills can be specifically promoted by humanitarian organizations to support Afghan women overcoming some of the identified barriers?

What kinds of capacity support can organizations offer to women staff so that they can overcome some of the barriers, and continue to work productively and safely with humanitarian agencies? What else can improve the work environment for women staff in humanitarian agencies?

Annex 2 – Focus group discussion tool

Barriers to women’s recruitment and retention in humanitarian aid work in Afghanistan

Focus group discussion guide

Date: _____

Moderator: _____ Note taker: _____

Location: _____ Number of participants in group: _____

Organizations represented: _____

Let us begin by introducing ourselves and briefly describing the kind of work we do, and for how long have we worked. (Field researcher will start by introducing herself and then ask others to follow suit.) She will read out the informed consent form and clarify the purpose of the discussion and establish rules of confidentiality, mutual respect, and encourage optimum participation.

Documenting barriers to recruitment and retention of women humanitarian workers

1. What barriers (personal, familial, social) prevent women from seeking employment with humanitarian organizations?

What have your personal experiences been with your families and communities? Is your family supportive of your work with your organization? Is there any opposition? Why? What do extended family, neighbours, male colleagues feel/say? Do you know of any families that did not allow women to work with your organization?

2. To what extent do hiring managers / teams struggle to attract qualified women candidates and why (e.g., lack of applicants, low qualifications, unwillingness to travel)? for which specific sectors and type of jobs?

Is it necessary to have women staff for humanitarian work? At what levels of staffing are they

needed? What proportion of your office staff is women? Is it difficult to hire women staff? Why do you think this is?

3. Once women are hired, to what extent is retention of the same staff an issue and what are the common reasons for attrition?

How long have you been working? In your opinion / experience why do women staff usually leave their jobs? How does the attitude of male colleagues affect the women staff? Can you give some examples?

4. How has the above changed since August 2021, and why?

How have the political changes since August 2021 affected your work life? Has working with your organization become more difficult/easier? Why? How has it affected other women aid workers you know?

Identifying methods for promoting recruitment and retention of women humanitarian staff

- 6. What methods can humanitarian agencies employ to maximize applications by qualified women staff (e.g., in use of specific job search platforms, in-person networks, formulation of job vacancy announcements)?**

In your opinion what should humanitarian aid agencies do to get more women to apply for jobs in your context/province? How would these methods vary according to location and skill level?

- 7. What reasonable adjustments can be applied during recruitment cycles to mitigate gendered barriers to recruitment and to promote equitable outcomes in recruitment (e.g., lowering of qualification requirements, removal or adjustment of testing procedures, adjustment of interview procedures and questions)?**

How can organizations better enable women applicants to get hired at different levels? What suggestions or advice can you offer to HR to enable more women applicants to get jobs? How can the work culture be more friendly toward women staff?

- 8. What specific incentives can humanitarian agencies provide to encourage applications by women and increase retention of women staff? For example, provisions for mahram, women-specific transport options, or subsidies.**

Understanding the barriers women face to working with humanitarian agencies, what more should agencies like yours do to help women so that they can get jobs, and continue to work? Can you name any facilities which should be provided so that women can continue to work and are not forced to leave their jobs?

- 9. What reasonable adjustments should be provided to women humanitarian workers, to encourage and support them in deployments to the field?**

What additional support do women aid workers need to be able to work in the field (interacting directly with beneficiaries/communities)? What should organizations like yours do to provide this support?

- 10. What skills can be specifically promoted by humanitarian organizations to support Afghan women overcoming some of the identified barriers?**

What kinds of capacity support can organizations offer to women staff so that they can be hired and can continue to work productively and safely with humanitarian agencies? What else can improve the work environment for women staff in humanitarian agencies?

Any last words of advice or observations you would like to share in conclusion?

Annex 3 – Participating organizations

Respondents were from the following agencies:

INTERNATIONAL NGOS	LOCAL NGOS/CSOS	UN AGENCIES
CARE International	Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA)	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Save the Children	Afghan Health and Development Services (AHDS)	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
Cordaid	Citizens Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR)	United Nations Children’s Funds (UNICEF)
Afghan Aid	Afghan Women’s Educational Centre (AWEC)	World Food Programme (WFP)
Search for Common Ground (SFCG)	Afghan Women’s Resource Centre (AWRC)	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the
		Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Afghan Women Network (AWN)	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)	Afghan Women Social Welfare Association (AWSWO)	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Afghan Bureau Collaboration Office (ABCO)	International Organization for Migrations (IOM)
Action Aid	Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO)	United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN Habitat)
Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)	Social Welfare and Rehabilitation organization (SWRO)	United Nations Volunteers (UNV)
Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)	Medica Afghanistan	
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Voice of Women (VOW)	
Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)	Women Activities and Social Services Association (WASSA)	
Community World Service Asia (CWSA)	Organization for Sustainable Aid in Afghanistan (OSSA)	
	Helping Hand for Relief (HHRD)	
	Women’s Initiative to Strengthen and Empower (WISE)	
	Afghan Women for Peace and Unity (AWPU)	
	Women for Women	
ACBAR		

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IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION
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