



Gendered Labor Rights Under Taliban Rule: Addressing Employment Inequality in Post-2021 Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, marked a pivotal moment in the nation's history and had profound implications for women's labor rights. This policy brief identifies the drastic reduction in women employment as a profound socioeconomic challenge, exacerbated by the de facto authority's restrictive policies towards women in the workforce. The study uniquely focuses on the intersection of gender and labor rights after regime change, analyzing the growing barriers to women's employment, which not only undermines gender equality but also threatens the broader socioeconomic stability of Afghanistan. This study aims to propose practical policy recommendations that address these inequalities and advocate for international intervention to protect women's labor rights in Afghanistan. Author utilized qualitative analysis, drawing from diverse policy documents and reports, to understand Afghan women's lived experiences under the Taliban regime. Key findings reveal that the Taliban's governance post-2021 has led to significant setbacks in women's employment across various sectors, contributing to economic regression and deepening gender disparities. The brief urges for international financial support to women-led organizations and the promotion of online and home-based employment, alongside relocation programs and rigorous data monitoring for effective policymaking.

Keywords: women labor rights, Taliban regime, employment inequality, Afghanistan



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INTRODUCTION

August 15, 2021, signifies the Taliban takeover and reestablishment as the de facto authorities (DFAs), a significant turning point in Afghanistan's history (UN report, 2023). The collapse of the former government by the Taliban and the restrictive rules on women's employment led to increased unemployment and resulted in a widespread violation of fundamental rights and justice for Afghan women. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims in Article 23, "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and protection against unemployment" (Kaci, 2015). However, currently, in Afghanistan, it is otherwise. Afghan women do not have the option and choice for employment. Yet, there is a lack of clear government policies on women's rights and concerns about labor force participation. Most women are limited to their homes, barred from participating in society, left helpless and uneducated about their freedom and fundamental rights, and excluded from everyday life due to rising rates of violence. Governmental acts and the implementation of new policies, which impose mortality assaults, have dissuaded women from exercising legitimate human rights (Janin & Kahlmeyer, 2007).

Remarkably, women play a crucial role in the economic development of a country. Providing equal opportunities to women as men in all economic activities and empowering them in the economy enhances sustainable development and strengthens the poverty alleviation policy (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Chaniago et al., 2021). Women's active participation in sustainable development policies is critical for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) and economic growth (Uygun & Gujrati, 2022). Likewise, Mincer (1962) highlights that female labor force involvement and participation in economic activities foster and contribute to robust growth. However, examining women's history in Afghanistan demonstrates that throughout history in Afghanistan, women have faced many difficulties (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Empowering women through educational opportunities, skill training, and employment can pave the way toward economic empowerment (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Additionally, Afghan women's economic and social contributions can positively influence their economic empowerment on broader social and political changes in Afghan society.

Post-2001, Afghanistan started a new chapter in achieving women's political freedoms, particularly regarding the regulations. In the new Constitution of Afghanistan, which was drafted in the last twenty years, the fundamental rights of women to have equal dignity and human rights were officially recognized (Basiriniya & Ghanizada, 2022). However, after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan returned 20 years, and again, women were once again denied even fundamental rights, like employment, education, involvement in public life, and other social affairs (Akbari & True, 2022).

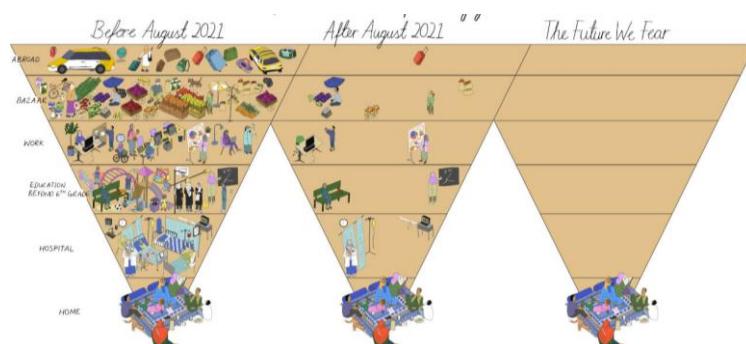


Figure 1: Afghan Women Freedom of Movement by Mona Chalabi Pre & Post-Taliban
Source: *UN Women – Headquarters, 2023*

Figure 1 demonstrates that before the regime change, the policies and Constitution ensured that women had access to, or at the very least, fundamental rights, enabling their participation in a wide range of societal activities. However, the political crisis in August 2021 spread uncertainty and doubt, leading to an economic disaster. As the United Nations (2023) reports, if the current situation persists, there is a growing concern that the conditions for women may deteriorate further, potentially leading to their complete exclusion from all public spheres, confining them solely to domestic roles. Following the collapse of the government, the central bank's foreign asset freeze caused a loss of trust in the banking industry (Brunk, 2023), interrupted essential public services, and abruptly stopped economic investment. Unfortunately, one of the current major issues in Afghanistan is the Human rights situation, mainly for women and girls. Generations have seen Afghan women battle for independence and equal rights. However, since the DFA took control, several obstacles have made it difficult for female humanitarian workers to participate in the response. Only a few provinces legally permit women's employment in humanitarian aid organizations (UN Women, 2022). These system changes in governance caused several firms to close, professionals to leave the country, and those who worked for the government to stop getting paid (Brunk, 2023).

The recent report of UN women (2023) highlights that the de facto authorities officially informed the United Nations On April 4, 2023, that no women are allowed to work with international organizations (UN) in Afghanistan and that they will firmly impose this measure. The regulation forbidding Afghan women from working for domestic and foreign NGOs was initially announced on December 24, 2022, and is now extended by this judgment. Currently, the de facto authorities have guaranteed the UN that the restriction does not apply to foreign women employed by the UN or Afghan women employed in the fields of education and health.

Given this dire situation for women in Afghanistan, this research offers several novel contributions to the understanding of women's economic empowerment and labor rights in Afghanistan, particularly in the context of the current political and economic crises, unlike Taylor (2022), Taasim & Daud (2020), and Hakimzai (2022) which focuses on pre-2021 policies and the historical trajectory of women rights. The research uniquely addresses the impact of recent political changes and ongoing crises on Afghan women's labor market participation. Unlike previous studies that may have focused on more stable periods and have discussed general issues for women, this research provides insights into how recent events have exacerbated existing challenges and created new barriers for women. Simultaneously, this policy brief offers detailed and actionable recommendations tailored to the current context. It emphasizes the need for international support and practical strategies in Afghanistan. Lastly, this analysis contributes to a more informed dialogue on what policies internationally can adapt to support women's rights in crisis-affected areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employment inequalities in Afghanistan have long been a contentious issue, shaped by socio-political changes and cultural norms. Under the Taliban rule, these challenges have intensified, marginalizing women in the workforce and threatening social stability and economic growth. Regime changes in Afghanistan and political and institutional changes significantly impacted female labor rights and employment equality. Understanding the dynamics of gendered labor rights during this period and the consequence of the recent takeover is essential for comprehending the current socio-political situation of the

country, as well as for analyzing the role of governance and institutional structures in shaping employment inequality for women post-2021.

In any context, institutions can function as factors to enable or restrict how individuals react (Smallbone & Welter, 2012; Efawati, 2023; Nuraini et al., 2024). Undeniably, institutions are the essential factors for individuals' economic behavior (North, 1990) and also form the economy, which impacts the dynamics of the labor market in any country. The better forms of institutions will lead to a higher quality labor market, eventually enabling significant development (Baumol & Strom, 2007). In the current context of Afghanistan, women face significant restrictions on their labor rights through regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars in the community (Scott, 2007). Under Taliban rule, these pillars have reinforced gendered labor inequality, shaping the framework through which women's participation in the labor market is constrained. Formal and informal institutions must collaborate to establish a cohesive framework where norms, rules, and laws impact labor market behavior (Efawati, 2020). In countries that experience political instability with poor law enforcement, the institutions are often weak (Welter & Smallbone, 2011; Chaniago & Efawati, 2024); in the context of Afghanistan, this is particularly relevant as the shifting governance structures and regulations impact women's labor rights.

The limitations on women's employment under Taliban rule have become a critical issue in global discussions, making it imperative for policymakers and researchers to examine gender-specific barriers and structural determinants of employment inequality following the regime change to ensure long-term social and economic sustainability. Numerous studies have identified different aspects that impact the participation of women in the labor market (Agüero and Marks, 2008; Faridi et al., 2009). Further, these studies have concluded that the key factors including educational attainment, and legal barriers determine women's involvement in the labor market. Additionally, Gaddis & Stephan (2013) and Mohammadinia (2021) highlight that economic development, social and cultural magnitudes, legal frameworks (such as laws and protections), and accessibility to finance influence how well women can engage in the workforce.

Moreover, Taylor (2022) studied the relationship between female education, workforce participation, and gender inequality in Afghanistan. This study found that female labor indicators are associated with gender inequality and gender development. Likewise, Taasim and Daud (2020) examined the gender unemployment. This study emphasized the importance of policies that increase women's participation in the labor market and build a favorable environment where all people in the market can take advantage equally.

Historically, in Afghanistan, women have faced frequent difficulties, and women are the first to be hindered by even minor changes in society. In 1996, the first regime of the Taliban, when they occupied the country, including Kabul, imposed extensive changes related to social instruction (Hanifi, 2012), which particularly impacted women's rights and freedom. Moreover, the Taliban also forbade women from working outside of their homes, and they believed that it violates Sharia law (Mendonca, 2021). They enforced strict rules, requiring women to cover themselves fully and mandating a Mahram for health interactions with males where women had no place in public. Hence, they claim that the leading cause of implementing these rules is to protect women's dignity and honor (Ghufran, 2001). After The United States of America's (USA) invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Laub, 2017), Afghanistan entered a new era in which women could access their fundamental rights, including attending the labor market, getting an education, as well as political rights, especially in the legal dimension (Basiriniya et al., 2022).

The USA's entrance in 2001 brought multiple funds from several international organizations to generate employment opportunities for Afghan women (Hashim, 1999). The core concern was advocating for human rights and encouraging women to participate in the workforce. From 1990 to 2021, women made up approximately 14-15% of the workforce in Afghanistan. It reached the highest point, where women comprised 21.57% of the labor market (Faria, 2022). In the last 20 years, the existence of the international community in Afghanistan was intended for the actual progress of women's empowerment and advancing women's role in society. Several initiatives took place in these years. The Ministry of Women's Affairs established which was responsible for handling the relevant issues to women and their rights. Women had the roles of ministers, provincial governors, and advisors. In addition, several international communities invested in providing both short and long-term projects to empower women and their capacity building, as well as to support women-led businesses. Moreover, several laws like the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW) (Afghanistan: Law, 2009), the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (UN Women, 2007), and the National Action Plans (NAP) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Af, 2015) in favor of women were adopted. Ahmed-Ghosh (2003) studied women's history in Afghanistan to demonstrate the importance of past experiences and lessons and how this can empower women positively for their future. It emphasizes the importance of economic empowerment for women in Afghanistan through education, skill training, and employment.

Besides, international initiatives, including substantial programs such as the \$216 million "Promote Program" implemented by USAID, focused on women's empowerment in Afghanistan in 2001. Progress and improvement in the health and education sector are evident; however, women's employment is not identically straightforward, especially among older people and in rural areas. Thus, these complications occurred, including high costs and monitoring problems for the government (World Bank, 2017).

Table 1: Initiative for elevating women's role in the economy

Program	Sponsors/Partners	Value (\$)	Target Group
Women's Rights Groups and Associations		29.5 million	A minimum of 5,000 activists
Women in Government Program		38 million	3,000 university graduate women aged 21-30
Women in the Economy Program	Promote-USAID	71.5 million	Educated women and women-owned businesses
Women's Leadership Development (WLD) Program		42 million	25,000 educated girls aged 18-30
Scholarships		22 million	Women and girls who wish to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate study
Training, Education, and Jobs in Afghanistan Through Non-Formal Approach Project	World Bank	18 million	Afghan Female and Male Youths Focusing on Rural and Semi-Urban zones
Emergency Education Rehabilitation & Empowerment Project		60 million	Underprivileged Populations, Especially Women And Girls

Source: *USAID Promote project report (2020) and World Bank Report (2013)*

Table 1 shows the programs initiated with the support of USAID and the World Bank. These programs aimed to empower Afghan women and enhance women's rights, and participation in government, to bring permanent positions within the Afghan civil service, thus ensuring more stable employment opportunities for educated women, economic empowerment of women, leadership skills, and access to education by providing scholarships across Afghanistan. These programs sought to assist women-led

organizations in each province's women-rights concerned organizations to promote and enhance cooperation and support gender equality endeavors. Overall, these programs supported women in advancing their rights via alliances, internships in both government and private sectors for positions in civil services, improving employment opportunities for women, and mentorships. Moreover, the small businesses led by women had a rise, particularly in areas like handicrafts, fashion, and technology (Myatt, 2015). Organizations such as the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) supported female entrepreneurs by providing platforms for networking and business growth.

Conversely, after the US withdrawal in August 2021, taking control of Afghanistan by the Taliban triggered a threat alarm to the re-imposition of restrictive laws. Naheed Sarabi, former deputy minister for policy in Afghanistan, states that in August 2021, the country faced a radical regime change. Further, she added that this change would fail to sustain developments and improvements, and women were also significantly impacted after the regime change (Brookings, 2022). The report from the World Bank (2023) shows that the employment rate drastically decreased and reached its lowest rate of 6% in the last quarter of 2021, indicating the disorder and alteration of administrations. Providing equal opportunities to both males and females to access the labor market and employment opportunities remains a key concern and priority for the better future of the Afghan community, economic growth, and sustainability.

RESEARCH METHOD

The author employed the qualitative content analysis approach, including policy documents and relevant reports, to assess the impact of recent political changes on labor rights and access to decent work in Afghanistan. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the narratives and themes within the available information, focusing on the qualitative aspects of the data (Guthrie et al., 2008; Chaniago et al., 2023). The analysis assesses the richness and depth of the information presented in various reports and documents, examining how well they capture the experiences and challenges faced by Afghan women (Duker et al., 2010). This policy analysis focuses on the socioeconomic context of Afghanistan, focusing on gender-specific challenges women face in the labor market. The significant resources used in this analysis include international and local organizations' publications and reports from the government.

Additionally, this analysis utilized a literature review to understand gendered labor rights and employment inequality in post-2021 Afghanistan. The literature review aims to establish a critical framework for examining the impact of the Taliban's regime on women's employment and rights, drawing from historical and contemporary sources (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Basiriniya & Ghanizada, 2022). This approach enables a thorough examination of the intersection between newly imposed regulations on the labor market and the lived experiences of Afghan workers (Mannell et al., 2021), particularly women, under the current regime. It examines the findings in light of the prevailing socio-political realities to understand emerging key challenges and develop policy-relevant implications regarding labor market engagement. Thus, this method enhances a balanced and informed study (Gibbs et al., 2018), which can aid in discussing labor rights and gender equality in Afghanistan.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The Taliban seizure and the restrictions on women's employment led to increased unemployment and resulted in a widespread violation of fundamental rights and justice for Afghan women. Most women are limited to their homes, barred from participating in society, left helpless, uneducated, and excluded from everyday life due to rising rates of violence. Governmental acts and the implementation of new policies, which impose mortality assaults, have dissuaded women from exercising legitimate human rights (Janin & Kahlmeyer, 2007), which is demanding urgent attention to address this dire situation.

According to the reports, it presents that in the last 20 years, the employment opportunities for women have increased and more women entered the workforce, entrepreneurship and women-led businesses have rise, especially in areas like handicrafts, fashion, and technology (UN Women, 2021). International aid organizations promoted women's participation in various sectors through capacity-building programs and vocational training initiatives. Women were encouraged to pursue careers in areas like agriculture, tailoring, and information technology. However, the UN (2023) reports that these small enterprises had decreased by 60% in 2021. It is necessary to address the obstacles that women face, including the microfinance sector, which is crucial for supporting the micro-enterprises led by women. Women's empowerment will happen if they are prioritized and at the forefront of any initiatives and efforts to resolve the Afghanistan crisis. This could be the best way to empower women economically and give them equal chances as men to participate in public spheres and economic activities.

While initiatives such as USAID's "Promote Program" aimed at women's empowerment through leadership, education, and employment programs were successful, the current regime has dismantled much of this progress. Despite such progress, some female politicians claimed that it was more like a strategy for winning the presidency for the next round than equality (Nehan, 2022; Ferris-Rotman, 2013). The community of Afghanistan is a male-dominated society where rarely they believe in women's empowerment and providing them the equal chance as men. Therefore, even though it was seen that women had participation in several parts of society, their role was more symbolic than influencer. This could be attributed to the political parties led by men influencing their political participation, who do not see women's participation as valuable. Nevertheless, for the system to bring practical change, it needs strong, knowledgeable, and skilled women who recognize and advocate for women's issues as national issues and advocate for administrating policies that accommodate women's needs.

Additionally, compared to the situation where the administration had not changed, there were around 690,000 employed, including both genders. In late 2022, employment in Afghanistan remained stagnant and was beyond by approximately four hundred thousand workers fewer than estimated during the same period before the crisis. According to UN News (2022), in the hypothetical scenario with no administrative changes, employment was reduced by 900,000 when comparing that quarter's workforce to the projected rate. Unemployment has increased since August 2021, with approximately 540,000 fewer employed compared to the first and second quarters in 2021.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, the number of female employees regrettably decreased by 0.4% in the 3rd quarter of 2023, while the number of male employees increased by 8.5% (NSIA, 2023). This significant drop presents the inequality between male and female access to the job market. The current imposed rules have been the primary element in this low ratio of women and have further exacerbated gender inequality, poverty, and social instability. This analysis highlights the intensive marginalization of women from a social and economic perspective. The restriction on

women's mobility, requiring male guardians (mahrams) for public interactions, has also contributed to the growing barriers for women in the workforce, as documented by Akbari & True (2022).

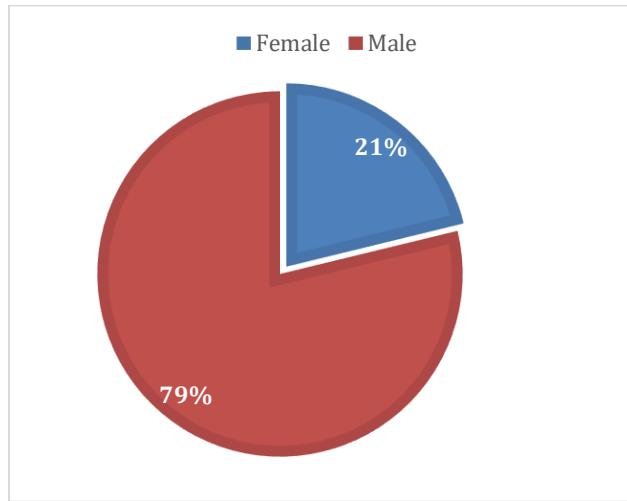


Figure 2: Total number of Civil Service Employees in the public sector

Source: NSIA, 2023

As of 2021, the lowest ratio of women in the work workforce is believed to be in Afghanistan (World Bank, 2022). Also, in terms of gender inequality, Afghanistan ranked 171st in the United Nations gender inequality index, and it was recognized as the most dangerous country for women to live in (Zhou et al., 2015). These concerning data have significant implications for the country, including socioeconomic inequality, poverty alleviation, overall growth, and development. Several reports from the World Bank and the UN indicate the profound impact of the Taliban regime on women's employment in Afghanistan post-2021. The analysis of reports from the World Bank (2022) and UN Women (2023) reveals a significant drop in women's employment following the Taliban takeover. The sharp decline of the women's ratio in the labor market to 6% can be attributed to the Taliban's restrictive policies, which severely limit women's access to employment in both the public and private sectors. Policies forbidding Afghan women from working with NGOs, except in education and health, have led to mass unemployment among women, particularly in rural areas where job opportunities were already limited.

Furthermore, the restrictions on women's rights and economic and humanitarian crises had severe impact on women, both economically and mentally. Women are more financially dependent than ever on the male members of their family. Following the imposed restrictions on women not only limited women to access the public spaces but also experienced significant income inequality compared to men.

It is important to promote women's involvement in productive activities as it will lead to economic growth and long-term, economically viable, sustainable growth (Duflo, 2012). Eventually, women need skills to propose a logical, local, and Islamic solution to the gender gap. For example, Afghan labor law articles indicate that harassment should be prevented in the work environment. However, it has never been implemented because women are not in such positions to back other women without the threat of losing their jobs. Additionally, women are afraid of talking about violence like harassment and assault inflicted on them. They are always taught that anything wrong happens because of them. Therefore, making the idea of "claiming your rights" common is fundamental. The recommendations emphasize financial support to women-led organizations, home-based

and online work promotion, and international pressure to remove employment restrictions. The analysis of these reports suggests that international advocacy and targeted policies could help mitigate some of the damages caused by the current regime, but immediate action is needed to prevent further regression.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this analysis highlight the significant regression in women's labor rights following the Taliban's takeover in 2021. The restrictive policies have not only curtailed women's access to employment but have also had broader socioeconomic consequences. The significant reduction in employment opportunities for women presents a shift back to patriarchal norms that prevent Afghan women from contributing to economic growth. The enforcement of these policies has had particularly adverse effects on women in rural and economically vulnerable communities, exacerbating gender inequality. The current policy direction of the Taliban regime has established 'rights-violating policies and created different barriers to women and girls' health and education, restricting freedom of movement and speech, as well as being associated while depriving many earned incomes.

The policy shifts in 2021 show an alarming reversal of gains in gender equality made over the previous two decades. It led to approximately 540,000 fewer women and men being employed compared to the second quarter of 2021. Additionally, compared to the situation where the administration had not changed, there were around 690,000 employed, including women and men. In late 2022, employment in Afghanistan remained stagnant and was beyond by approximately four hundred thousand fewer workers estimated during the same period before the crisis. In the hypothetical scenario with no administrative changes, employment was reduced by 900,000 when comparing that quarter's workforce to the projected rate. Furthermore, the imposed restriction on women's employment and mobility since the regime change has led to some women leaving the labor force. Providing equal opportunities to both males and females to access quality education and employment will remain a key concern, challenge, and priority for the better future of the Afghan community and economy (UN News 2022).

Figure 3 presents the ten years of women's participation in the labor market. Based on the World Bank data, women's participation was 18 percent in 2013, and it had increased and reached the highest point, where women comprised 22 percent of the labor force (Faria, 2022). However, following the regime change, it shows that these profound changes in government and administrations have significantly higher adverse impacts on women than men. The recent report of the United Nations (2023) highlights a concerning regression, especially in employment opportunities for Afghan women. The Taliban's ban on women working not only increased unemployment but also resulted in a widespread violation of fundamental rights and justice for Afghan women. On the other hand, the lack of clear government policies on women's rights and the labor force signifies a major issue. In the last quarter of 2022, it is estimated that 25 percent of female employment has decreased compared to 2021. Female employment declined considerably in the first few months after the administration's change and stabilized at deficient levels. According to the UN Women (2021) report, some women turned to self-employment in fields including agriculture, piece workers, or clothing repair to supplement the income of their households and prevent the drop in female labor (UN Women, 2021).

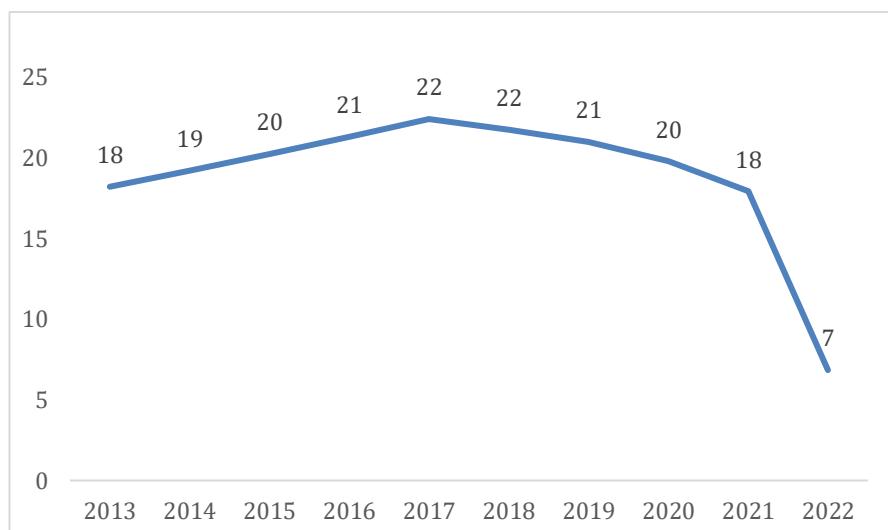


Figure 3: 10 years of FLFP rate fluctuations

Source: *World Bank*

The rising issue in women's labor rights and decreasing employment is not merely an issue of employment but a significant threat to Afghanistan's overall economic stability. By excluding women from the workforce, Afghanistan is effectively losing half of its productive labor force, which could have been a driver for economic development. In 2021, through initial estimations, illustrates a sharp economic shrinking with GDP by (20.7%) and additional contraction in 2022, with a 30-35 percent cumulative shrinkage, primarily due to declining industrial and service demand (World Bank, 2021).



Figure 4: Fluctuations in GDP Growth of Afghanistan Pre/Post-Taliban Regime

Source: *United Nations Development Program, World Bank*

Figure 4 indicates that Afghanistan's GDP experienced significant fluctuations from 2014 to 2023. In the earlier part of the decade, GDP growth was modest, with the GDP of Afghanistan at around 2-3%, mainly due to international aid, but it saw a decline in subsequent years, while the economic impact of the pandemic further lowered it to about -2.4% in 2020. Despite this, in 2021, following the return of the Taliban, the economy contracted sharply by -20.7% due to sanctions, reduced foreign aid, and restrictions on women's participation in the workforce. According to the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP) estimation, there could be at least a 5 percent drop in the total country's GDP, equivalent to \$1 billion, depending on the extent of restrictions on the female workforce (Safi, 2024). Eventually, after the announcement of their temporary decision to reinstate secondary school levels for girls in March, Washington suspended negotiations on releasing about \$7 billion in Afghan government assets held by US

officials which furthered the economy of the country. Further, the White House put on hold \$600 million for education and health programs in Afghanistan and agriculture (Faria, 2022). It underscores the catastrophic effects that gendered labor inequality can have on national development. The restrictions on women's participation in various sectors have worsened poverty rates and weakened Afghanistan's economic resilience in the face of crises.

CONCLUSIONS

This policy brief analyzed the critical challenges faced by Afghan women in the labor market post-2021 under the Taliban regime that need to be addressed urgently. The regression in women's labor rights, coupled with the lack of clear government policies on women's employment, presents a dire situation that demands immediate attention.

Afghan women have strong desires to aspire to their potential and, in the long run, make significant contributions to Afghan society for themselves and their daughters. Currently, due to political uncertainties, Afghanistan is facing a considerable challenge. The ongoing crises have had a massive impact on the livelihood of many Afghan people in Afghanistan, especially the most vulnerable groups, particularly women. Consequently, this change has affected the labor market. The primary economic sectors, such as social services, agriculture, public administration, and construction, have faced challenging and severe conditions leading to high job and income loss. However, the employment conditions of women, especially young women, are still dire. It is crucial to promote gender equality, support women's economic participation, and advocate for their labor rights to foster sustainable growth and social development in Afghanistan. International support and targeted policies and interventions will ensure that Afghan women have equal opportunities to contribute to the nation's economic and social progress. This requires a concerted effort from both local and international stakeholders to develop strategies that address the unique challenges faced by Afghan women in this new political and economic context.

Although this study provided a comprehensive analysis of the gendered labor rights under the DFA ruling, this research has the following limitations that future studies can consider. Initially, the analysis relies on secondary data, which may not fully capture Afghan women's nuanced and evolving socioeconomic conditions. Limited access to recent and comprehensive data may affect the accuracy of the findings. In addition, the rapid political changes and ongoing crises in Afghanistan mean that the study's findings may become outdated quickly, potentially limiting the relevance of recommendations shortly.

RECOMMENDATION

To effectively support women's rights and economic empowerment in Afghanistan, the international community must make the employment rights of women the red line and non-negotiable for all decisive factors on engagement in Afghanistan. Through direct negotiations, negotiate with the de facto authorities to eliminate the restriction on females being an employee for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and to extend it to the United Nations alongside Afghan women. Furthermore, it provides financial backing to women-led organizations that advance these causes. In addition to advocating for the complete revocation of the ban on women employed by NGOs and its extension to the UN, there should be a strong emphasis on enabling women to engage in online and home-

based enterprises. These initiatives would allow women to generate income, pursue career and educational goals, and access online psychological support.

Furthermore, expanding opportunities for women and girls through scholarships and relocation programs is essential, alongside international cooperation, to ensure a safe environment for those seeking to relocate. Collaborating with global stakeholders on women's rights is vital for integrating gender considerations into national and international development agendas. Strengthening monitoring systems to record women's employment and rights accurately is necessary for effective policy-making. Finally, there must be a concerted effort to advocate for the creation of explicit government policies that address gender equality and labor force participation, along with the development and implementation of gender-inclusive economic policies that actively promote women's workforce participation, particularly in traditionally exclusionary sectors.

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