



Periodic Rapid Perception Survey on the Shift in Social Practices and Access to Services for Women and Girls in Afghanistan – Round #3

March 2022

Prepared by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, Afghanistan

Key Findings

1. *Mahram* imposition remains the most limiting factor for women and girls, particularly for women with no male relatives or families with a large number of women. Taxi drivers are forbidden from picking up women not wearing the Islamic hijab or without the accompaniment of a mahram. Experiences of harassment even with a mahram are reported by respondents.
2. **94%** of key informants indicated that women faced increased difficulties in accessing services during the months of November/December 2021 and January 2022, compared to previous months. Education was widely highlighted as the most difficult sector to access, followed by the legal sector, protection, health and food.
3. The majority of 64 key informants (**94%**) believed numerous barriers will continue to hamper women and girls' effective access to education, as this is already occurring in areas where schools and universities have remained open. Close follow-up by humanitarian actors will be required, including through continuous engagement with the de facto authorities to ensure implementation of the announcement by the de facto authorities to reopen schools and universities for all girls and women by 21 March 2022.
4. Women's job loss continues to be of primary concern, with rates remaining high across all perception survey rounds. In Round 3 of this survey series, of the 59 respondents (**87%**) who reported that they knew women who had lost their jobs in November/December 2021, or January 2022, **97%** said that this has happened to most women they know. It remains important to sustain and strengthen advocacy with the de facto authorities on women's participation in the workforce, including across the spectrum of humanitarian aid delivery.

5. **72%** of respondents reported the imposition of new rules by families on women and girls. The mahram condition for mobility outside the home remains the most limiting factor imposed by families on women and girls, followed by restricting women from going to work and stopping girls from attending school.
6. **71%** of respondents reported that women-led civil society organizations (CSOs) are not operating in their area, a majority of whom cited restrictions as impacting CSO operational presence, alongside fear and insecurity. The impact of sanctions on CSO access to funds was also reported as affecting their ability to work. Given the important role of women CSOs in ensuring availability of services for women and girls, it is crucial to amplify the support given to these organizations, enabling space and opportunities to obtain required protection and funds to operate.
7. **62%** of respondents indicated not knowing how to report instances of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA) by aid providers, with **91%** reporting that, in their opinion, affected people would not know where or how to report allegations of SEA. Humanitarian actors and coordination bodies must put immediate strategies in place to address the lack of reporting knowledge and awareness among first respondents and affected populations.

Purpose

This document reflects the findings of Round 3 of the Periodic Rapid Perception Surveys conducted by the Afghanistan Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group. The aim of the periodic perception surveys is to map changing social practices pertaining to the rights of women and girls and their perceptions of access to humanitarian services across Afghanistan.

The specific objectives of the Periodic Rapid Perception Surveys are to:

- Document national humanitarian staff and women's civil society representatives' perceptions of changing social practices for women and girls at the provincial level;
- Map key informants' perceptions of the levels of access to key sectors of humanitarian services for women and girls; and
- Inform advocacy priorities.

Methodology

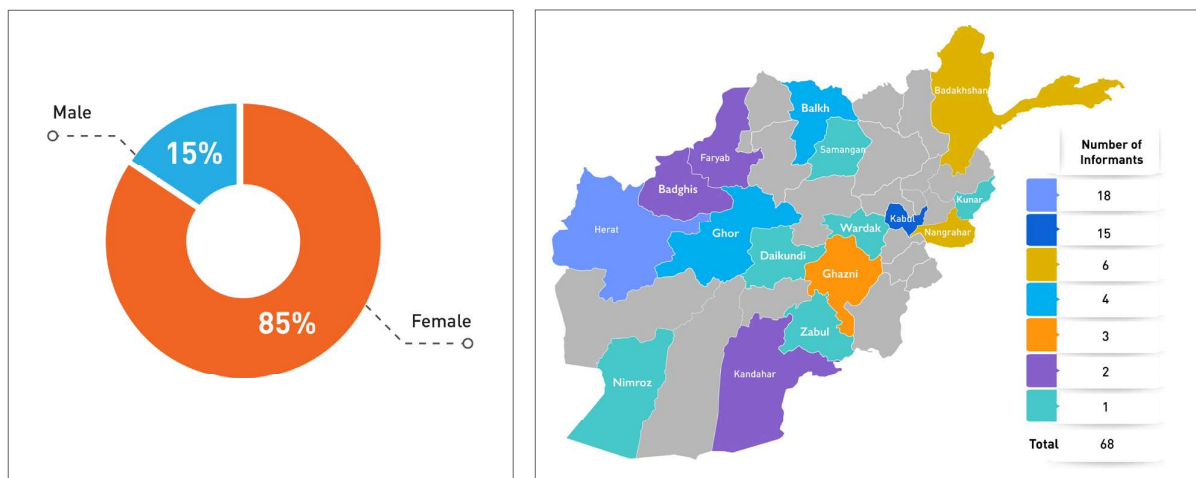
- Telephone-based qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted in English, Dari and Pashto. This methodology was chosen due to operational and security barriers to conducting in-person assessments with crisis-affected women.
- Ethical considerations: Surveyors were trained on safety standards for conducting telephone interviews, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, disclosures, gender-based violence safe referral, basic protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (Inter-Agency Standing Committee six core principles) and surveyor self-care practices. Data protection protocols were followed.
- For Round 3 of the Rapid Perception Surveys, KIIs were conducted during the period 23-27 January 2022, covering the months of November and December 2021 and January 2022. The sample comprised 68 respondents: 58 women and 10 men.

Limitations

- Data from the KIIs shows the perceptions of humanitarian staff and women’s civil society representatives. This is not a representative sample and is not necessarily representative of voices of other community members.
- Data from interviews has not been verified or triangulated using other methods.
- Comparisons with previous rounds of the Rapid Perception Surveys should take into consideration the differences in sample composition.

Key informant demographics

In this third survey round, the majority of key informants were women aged 24-44 years, from 16 provinces, almost half of whom live in Herat or Kabul provinces. Of the 68 informants, all but two are university graduates and three identified as a person with a disability.



Informant profile

Key informants: 10 men and 58 women.

26 respondents had also participated as key informants in previous rounds.

The respondents were contacted through the humanitarian coordination structures (e.g. the thematic clusters and working groups).

Newly established rules or announcements on women

As in previous survey rounds, respondents were asked to provide information about the establishment and prevalence of rules that restrict the public activities of women and girls in their province of Afghanistan, based on their current knowledge. Below are the findings in regard to three specific issues: clothing, movement and shopping.



Clothing: 66% of key informants reported newly established rules or public announcements concerning women's clothing during November/December 2021 and/or January 2022.¹

The most commonly reported new rules or announcements included: specifications regarding mandatory wearing of the Islamic hijab; general comments about clothing restrictions; and specific restrictions on clothing at work/school, with several respondents specifying the rule of only being allowed to wear "long black dresses".

Many respondents indicated that rules or announcements were disseminated through social media, television, official letters and leaflets.

In comparison with previous survey rounds – 93% in Round 1 and 86% in Round 2, the prevalence of new rules or announcements appears to have decreased, although it remains significant. Respondents also confirmed that the restrictions established since 15 August 2021 remain in place.

"I saw a banner in front of the university that shows a woman wearing a hijab, saying this is the Islamic hijab for female students."
– Afghan woman



Movement 67% of key informants reported newly established rules or public announcements and/or banners concerning the restricted movement of women outside the home during November 2021, December 2021 and/or January 2022.

Rules and announcements on women's movement most commonly reported by respondents included: regulations on mandatory mahram and restrictions on women's ability to travel (e.g. prohibition on solo travelling/without hijab/long distances/outside of their city or home/to work or school/in the front seat of a vehicle). It appears that these restrictions are not only specified for women but also for taxi drivers, who, as reported by one informant, are forbidden from picking up women not wearing the hijab or who are unaccompanied by a mahram.

Many respondents indicated that rules or announcements were disseminated through official letters, social media, and warnings issued to drivers, as well as at mosques.

The percentage of key informants reporting movement restrictions slightly decreased from Round 2 of these surveys [72%], but remained higher than that recorded during Round 1 [54%].

"Without a mahram, movement is impossible for all women, they cannot go to the office, school, university and there are limitations even in public transportation."
– Afghan woman

When asked specifically about challenges in commuting to work/recreation, 73% of key informants perceived that women are facing challenges in this regard, while 24% reported no such challenges, and 3% stated that they did not know.

Additional challenges are experienced by women who do not have any men in their family, including widows. Some reported that women are experiencing harassment or questioning at checkpoints, even when accompanied by a mahram.



Shopping: 22% of key informants indicated that shopkeepers are not selling goods to "unaccompanied women" (i.e. women not accompanied by a male relative), which represents an increase compared to Round 2, when 14% of respondents indicated this perception.

As in previous perception surveys, rules pertaining to movement and clothing are perceived as being most prevalent. However, new impositions – such as the requirement for women to be accompanied by a close male relative if travelling distances greater than 72km² – have worsened current obstacles to women's access to work, education and basic services.

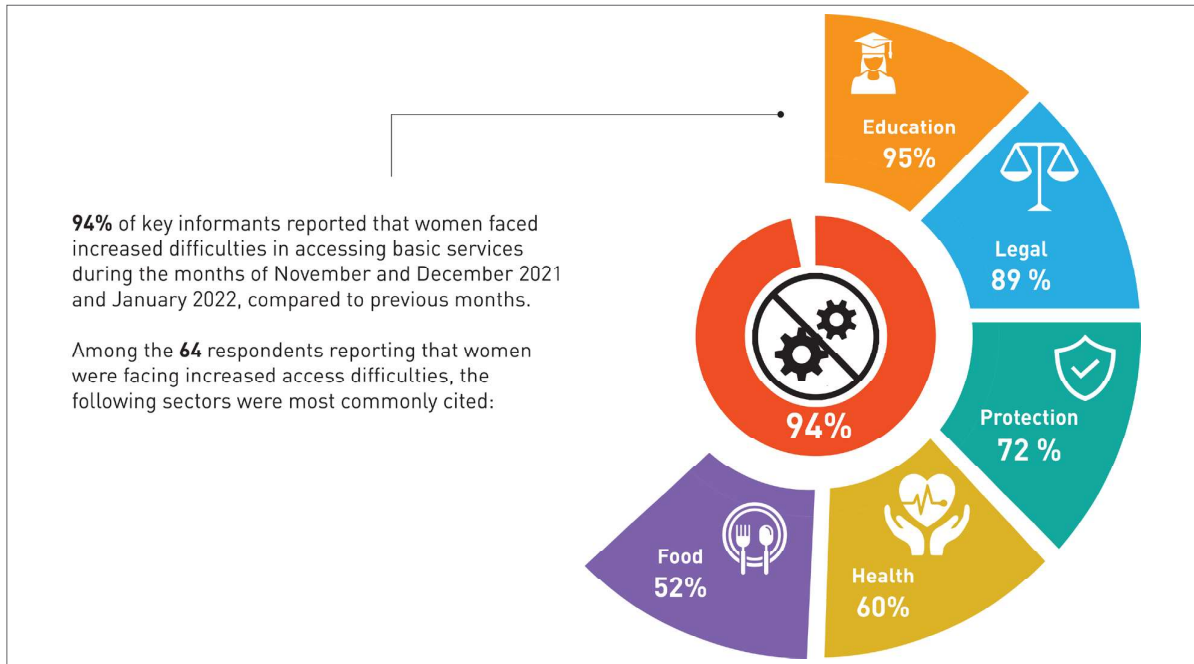
¹Key informants were not specifically asked whether older rules around clothing previously enforced are still being enforced; however, respondents did state that new public announcements were made regarding the previously cited rules.

²Agence France-Presse. 2021. "No long-distance travel for women without male relative: Taliban." Al Jazeera, News, Women's Rights, 26 December 2021. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/26/afghanistan-long-distance-travel-women-without-male-escort-taliban>.

Women's access to services

"In attempting to get a passport, women face a lot of disrespect from the Taliban."

– Afghan woman



95% of respondents indicated that such access difficulties were being faced by most women they know.

The following factors in limited access were cited by over 75% of respondents:

- Newly imposed mobility restrictions on women (e.g. mandatory accompaniment of a male relative outside the home and wearing of the hijab [79%]);
- Fear and insecurity [77%]; and
- Combination of restrictions and the security environment [92%].

Other commonly cited barriers and challenges included: lack of availability of services, lack of job opportunities for women, financial conditions (such as unaffordability of services, lack of financial support, increasing prices for food and other essentials), lack of legal aid and social support. Further topics explored by respondents (cited by less than 50%) included: lack of transport, lack of proximity to services, lack of trained female service providers, lack of trust in the health and social system.

Women and girls' access to education

"I needed to study at the university library, but the Taliban did not allow me, they were asking about a mahram, but my father is the only man in my family."

– Afghan student

The de facto authorities have announced the **reopening of schools and universities** for all girls

and women by 21 March 2022,³ but 64 key informants (94%) reported believing that barriers will remain for women and girls in accessing education, including: mandatory mahram (18 respondents), uncertainty about new restrictions or changes to existing restrictions (15), mandatory hijab and/or clothing restrictions (22), lack of female teachers (12), loss of interest in education due to lack of work prospects free from restrictions (11), segregation by gender (9), lack of adequate capacity and support provided by de facto authorities (8), fear of insecurity (6), transportation (6), budget problems (3) and changes in curriculum (3). Many stated they do not believe that schools or universities will reopen to all women and girls.

“Women will not be able to go alone to schools and universities, because there will be no female teachers.”

– Afghan woman

Women’s access to work

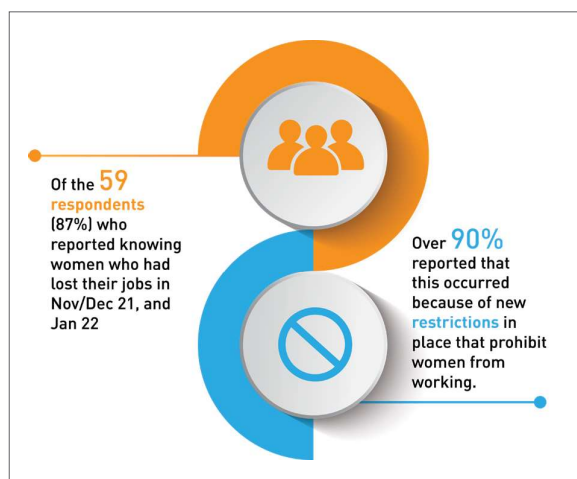
“My opinion has changed from the previous interview, because during this time I came back to the office and really faced many problems, even my family does not encourage me to continue working, because my dignity is not respected by the Taliban.”

– Afghan woman

87% of key informants stated that they know women who have lost their jobs during the period November 2021 through January 2022, of which 97% reported that this happened to most women they know; 3% chose the “do not know” response.

Over 60% cited fear stemming from insecurity as the driving reason, while in excess of 95% indicated that the Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic was not a motivating reason in this regard.

Additionally, 50% of the 68 key informants reported knowing organizations that are actively following a policy of not employing women.



Operational space for women’s civil society organizations

Key informants were asked to detail their knowledge on the **operational constraints faced by women-led CSOs** in their geographical area.

- 71% of respondents reported that women-led CSOs are no longer working in their area;
- 19% reported that women-led CSOs are still operating in their area; and
- 10% indicated that they do not know.

Of the 48 respondents (71%) who reported that women-led CSOs are no longer working in their area, the most commonly cited reasons were: new restrictions in place that prohibit women from working (85%) and fear due to insecurity (69%). When asked about the impact of sanctions on the

³Al Jazeera and News Agencies. 2022. “Taliban says all Afghan girls will be back in school by March.” Al Jazeera, News, Women’s Rights, 17 January 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/17/taliban-says-will-open-all-schools-for-girls-across-country>.

ability of women-led CSOs to operate, several respondents indicated CSO ability as being jeopardized by lack of money or financial support from donors.

Key informants were requested to provide recommendations on how to address these barriers and restore women's rights, to which some responded that sanctions could be used as leverage over the de facto authorities.

Of those reporting that women-led CSOs are no longer working in their area (48 respondents), 98% cited the new restrictions in place as impacting their ability to operate. Some respondents stated that a reduction in the operational presence of women CSOs has contributed to women and girls having reduced access to services within the areas of health care, work, protection, legal affairs and education.

Asked whether women-led CSOs have adapted their ways of working, 63% of key informants indicated that such adaptation had not occurred, while 13% indicated that this had occurred; 22% reported "do not know", with 2% declining to answer the question.

Of the 9 respondents (13%) who reported that women-led CSOs have adapted their ways of working, some of the examples provided included: segregation of office space by Gender; changes in activities, including mahram adherence; considering beneficiaries introduced by the de facto authorities. One key informant mentioned that the de facto authorities tend to meet with Pashto native speakers rather than Dari speakers, which poses an additional barrier.

Concerning engagement with the de facto authorities, the majority of respondents (75%) believed that women-led CSOs were not engaging with them. Only a limited number of key informants (4%) indicated the contrary, while 19% of respondents reported not knowing accurate information in this regard, and 2% preferring not to answer the question.

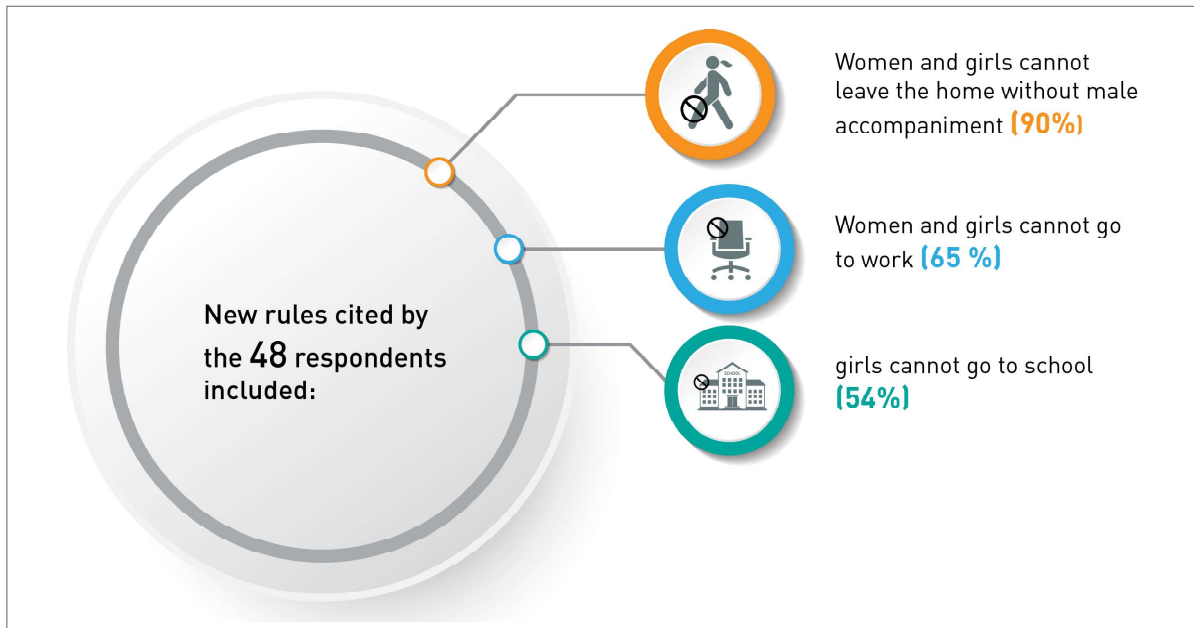
According to the three key informants who reported that women-led CSOs were engaging with the de facto authorities, this engagement was said to include:

- CSO clarification of their programmes to the de facto authorities and subsequent permission being granted to continue their activities; and
- CSOs implementing vocational learning courses for girls which were acceptable to the de facto authorities.

Family-imposed restrictions on women and girls

"In this situation, women do not have the courage to raise their challenges, even to go to the hospital. They may face many types of violence but bear with all of them."
– Afghan woman

In Round 3 of the Rapid Perception Survey, the majority of respondents (72%) indicated believing that families have imposed new rules on women and girls. The percentage of respondents who believed this is very similar to that recorded during Round 2 of this survey series (76%).

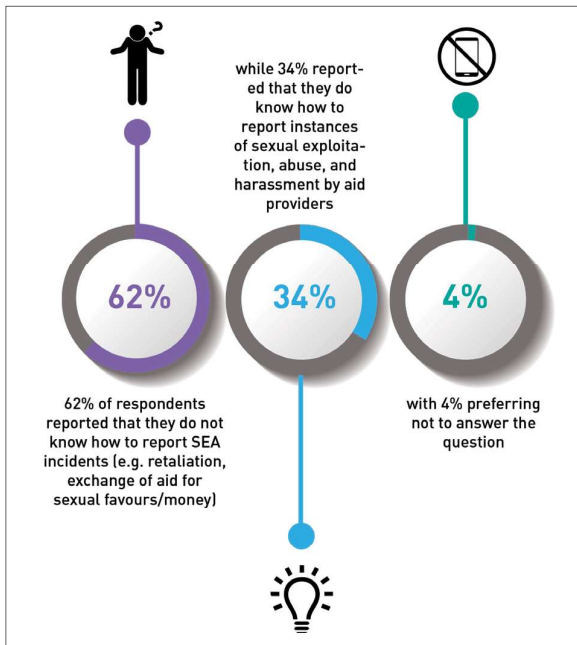


- “Other” common practices and norms imposed reported include: use of the hijab and forced or child marriage; most respondents also indicated that these practices and norms were enforced by families due to fear of the de facto authorities or/and insecurity.
- Of the 48 respondents, almost 90% reported that families were introducing these rules within their households because of new restrictions in place that prohibit women from working; over 85% reported that it was because of fear driven by insecurity; and over 60% cited newly announced rules from local leaders as a motivating factor.
- Other barriers/challenges reported by the 48 respondents include: lack of employment opportunities for women; patriarchal structures; and lack of knowledge on human rights. One respondent indicated that men are happy about the new restrictions imposed on women and another respondent highlighted the increase in mental health problems and domestic violence as a result of restrictions.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

“I am sure many women who faced sexual abuse could not raise a complaint, because of stigma or not having any relatives that support the victim.”
 – Afghan woman

A set of questions related to SEA was included for the first time in the periodic rapid perception survey (hence, a comparison with previous rounds is not possible).



Recommendations for humanitarian aid actors

Key informants were asked to share their expectations of humanitarian aid actors. The most common responses have been grouped together and highlighted below in the form of recommendations:

- 85% of key informants reported they do not think people in their community would feel comfortable reporting SEA incidents, with 60% stating (“not at all”) and 25% indicating the “not really” response.
- 91% of key informants reported that they believe that those affected by SEA would not know where and how to report their allegations; three respondents also stated that in the absence of specific entities, such as the now disbanded Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and Women Protection Centres, and without a coordination system between women-led CSOs, reporting these cases is even more difficult.
- Prioritize the provision of social services to women, food assistance and economic opportunities, particularly in regard to creating and providing employment opportunities and cash-based interventions.
- Identify and target the most vulnerable, such as women-headed households, widows, and those living in rural and hard-to-reach areas.
- Boost transparency measures and monitor aid work. Some respondents highlighted the importance of not involving the de facto authorities or allowing their interference in humanitarian aid.
- Increase direct funding for women’s rights issues and women-led organizations and continue current assistance and interventions.
- Provide aid for internally displaced persons and migration services.
- Ensure that the international community continues its advocacy for inclusion of women in governance structures, as well as for women’s equal access to the education system and general services, including mental health services.