

PRESS STATEMENT

Press contact (UN Women): ann-marie.wilcock@unwomen.org
(UNAMA): spokesperson-UNAMA@un.org

WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN NEARLY FOUR TIMES LESS LIKELY THAN MEN TO HAVE ACCESS TO FORMAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS, UN FINDINGS

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KABUL – Women in Afghanistan are nearly four times less likely than men to have access to formal justice mechanisms,¹ according to new findings released by the United Nations in Afghanistan on International Women’s Day, highlighting a widening justice gap that is leaving many women without safe avenues to assert their rights, seek protection or challenge abuse.

The findings underscore how many Afghan women have been left without safe or effective avenues to resolve disputes or hold perpetrators of abuse to account, compounding a crisis for Afghanistan’s women and girls who have already been subjected to a raft of restrictions by Afghanistan’s *de facto* authorities.

“When large segments of society face barriers to resolving disputes or seeking protection, it weakens trust in institutions and leaves communities and individuals more vulnerable,” said Georgette Gagnon, Officer in Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan.

UN Women Special Representative, Susan Ferguson, said access to justice is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of women’s safety and dignity.

“When women are excluded from justice institutions, it undermines their safety, autonomy and their few remaining opportunities to seek help outside of the home. This is especially important for women experiencing domestic violence.”

According to the findings, only 14 per cent of women consulted reported having access to formal dispute resolution services, compared to 53 per cent of men.

The findings are based on nationwide in-person and online consultations conducted by UN Women, UNAMA, and the International Organization for Migration in December 2025.²

More than half of the women consulted said their access to formal justice mechanisms had worsened over the past year.

Women largely attributed this situation to the *de facto* authorities’ suspension of key institutional and legal mechanisms, including the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as the exclusion of women professionals from the legal sector and loss of many women-centred justice services.

¹ As with all perception-based data, findings reflect respondents’ perspectives and are not intended to independently verify events or establish legal or factual determinations.

² The findings are based on nationwide in-person and online consultations conducted in December 2025 reaching over 800 Afghan women and 160 men.

The *de facto* authorities' Decree No. 12 on discretionary punishments, shared with the courts for implementation earlier this year, has added further barriers for women seeking protection or accountability through the justice system.

Access to informal dispute resolution mechanisms – such as community jirgas and shuras, which are traditional councils of community elders that can mediate disputes – was also significantly lower for women, further limiting their ability to resolve disputes or seek protection.

Afghan women and men who participated in the consultations called for a range of actions, including the strengthening of institutional mechanisms to safeguard women's access to justice; the re-establishment of women-centred and women-led dispute resolution mechanisms, including through women-only committees at the community level, and support for confidential counselling services and affordable support centres for women, offering legal, psychosocial and protection-related assistance.

The global theme for [International Women's Day 2026](#) – 'Rights, Justice, Action. For all Women and Girls' – calls for action to dismantle all barriers to equal justice, including discriminatory laws, weak legal protections, and harmful practices and social norms that erode the rights of women and girls.
