

Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan:

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2024 UPDATE

About this update

This update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan covering the period from October to December 2024¹ is based on monitoring by UNAMA's Human Rights Service conducted in accordance with its mandate from the UN Security Council.²

Rights of women and girls

As noted in the UNAMA statement on the occasion of Human Rights Day on 10 December 2024: "The human rights record of the *de facto* authorities has been especially marked by their systemic discrimination against women and girls, who are excluded from most areas of daily and public life, including education and work."³

During the reporting period, the *de facto* authorities imposed further restrictions on the rights of women and girls. (See the Annex to this update for a timeline of decrees and edicts introduced by the *de facto* authorities since 15 August 2021 which impact women and girls.)

Ban on women studying in medical institutes

On 2 December, in Kabul, the Deputy Minister of the *de facto* Ministry of Public Health verbally informed representatives of medical institutes from across Afghanistan that from 3 December, female students would not be permitted to attend classes in medical institutes. These institutes provide courses in a range of disciplines, including midwifery, nursing, dental care, anesthesiology, medical laboratory sciences and nutrition. Women had already been prevented from studying medicine at university since the *de facto* authorities' ban on women attending university, introduced on 20 December 2022.

In an interview with TOLO News, Indrika Ratwatte, Deputy Special Representative of

the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, highlighted the impact the ban would have on thousands of women currently studying in medical institutes:

"36,000 midwives were in training, 3,000 nurses were in training. If this is stopped in private and public medical institutes, these people will not graduate and that means [they] will not be able to go to communities in Afghanistan to help women and girls and will have a direct impact on their health and well-being."⁴

At the time of the ban, most medical institutes were yet to administer final examinations for their students. On around 3 December, the *de facto* Ministry of Higher Education reportedly issued a letter to some medical institutes stating that final examinations for female students must be administered within two weeks. As a result, some of the institutions proceeded to conduct examinations for their female students despite these students not having completed their coursework. The examinations of male students were reportedly unaffected.

To date, the *de facto* authorities have not conveyed the ban in writing.

Impact of the Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on women

The *de facto* authorities continued to implement the Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice⁵ (the 'PVPV Law') in ways which discriminated against women and girls, impacting their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Provincial *de facto* Departments for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice are applying the *mahram* requirement in ways not clearly specified by the PVPV Law, creating additional barriers for women and girls to access public services, attend work and conduct other activities outside their

¹ All dates referenced in this update refer to 2024, unless otherwise specified.

² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2626 (2022), extended by Resolution 2727 (2024).

³ <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-urges-de-facto-authorities-embrace-global-human-rights-obligations>

⁴ <https://tolonews.com/index.php/health-192091>

⁵ For a discussion of the PVPV Law, see: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english_-_unama_-_update_on_hr_situation_in_afghanistan_-_july-sept_2024.pdf (UNAMA, October 2024).

homes. For example:

- Female health workers in some provinces have been required by *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors to be accompanied by a *mahram* when commuting to and from work. The *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to UNAMA that: “The issue of “Mahram” is clarified in the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue, Prohibition of Vice and Hearing of Complaints Law. Nothing like this has been done”.
- In December, in Kandahar province, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors visited a local restaurant and instructed staff not to allow women without *mahrams* to enter the restaurant and to ensure no intermingling between women and men from different families.

UNAMA also received reports of *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors instructing health clinics, shops, markets and restaurants to deny service to women not accompanied by a *mahram*.

In some provinces, *de facto* Departments for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice imposed additional, arbitrary restrictions on women which are not contained in the PVPV Law:

- In October, in Samangan province, Hazar-e-Sultan district, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice issued a written instruction to drivers in the district stating that women are forbidden from sitting in the front seat of a car.⁶ The *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to UNAMA that

“The Ministry of Promotion of Virtue, Prohibition of Vice and Hearing of Complaints officials and inspectors express with confidence that they are not and have not committed any act that violates any article, clause, section or part of their well-documented and reasoned law. Based on our thorough investigations and information, [this] is far from the truth.”

- In November, in Kabul, *de facto* Department for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice inspectors visited a private hospital and instructed female nurses to stop working in the emergency ward, telling them they should instead work in areas designated for women, such as gynecology.

Girls' education

In November, *de facto* Departments of Education in Paktya and Nangarhar province instructed schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) implementing Accelerated Learning Programmes⁷ to stop classes for girls until further notice. Boys' classes remained open in both provinces. The reason for the instruction is unknown.

Women's access to work

The *de facto* authorities have barred women from participating in some trade fairs and ordered the closure of some women-run shops.⁸ For example, the *de facto* authorities prohibited women from participating in the “Ganjina Afghanistan National Exhibition” held in Khost city between 15 and 17 October. Only male exhibitors were permitted to showcase their products.

On 24 December 2022, the *de facto* Ministry of Economy issued an order prohibiting Afghan female staff from working for

⁶ Other provisions in this written instruction include prohibitions on: drivers transporting women unaccompanied by a *mahram*; drivers engaging in romantic conversation with female passengers; and playing music. The instruction also requires drivers to pray five times a day at a mosque.

⁷ Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs) focus on completing learning in a shorter period. ALPs are a form of complementary education. Similar to alternative education, they have the same end-point as a formal education system but reach it in less time. The ALP is complementary both in providing an alternative route and in matching its curriculum to the 'official' curriculum, allowing learners to return to formal schooling at some stage. See: [https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/tvetipedia+glossary/lang=en/show=term/term=Accelerated+learning+programme#:~:text=Accelerated%20learning%20programme%20\(ALP\),reach%20it%20in%20less%20time](https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/tvetipedia+glossary/lang=en/show=term/term=Accelerated+learning+programme#:~:text=Accelerated%20learning%20programme%20(ALP),reach%20it%20in%20less%20time).

⁸ These measures are usually carried out through verbal instructions to female shopkeepers and vendors, often by *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors, although other *de facto* Ministries have also been involved at times.

domestic and international NGOs. On 26 December, the *de facto* Ministry of Economy disseminated a letter reminding NGOs of the directive issued on 24 December 2022 and advising them to “work accordingly”.⁹ During the reporting period, UNAMA also received reports of women’s applications for work permits related to employment with both national and international NGOs being denied by *de facto* Departments for Labour and Social Affairs in some provinces.

Gender-based violence

During the reporting period, UNAMA recorded incidents of gender-based violence against women and girls, including murders; so-called honour killings; child marriages; forced marriages; rape; domestic violence and suicides because of domestic violence. In some instances, *de facto* officials referred high severity cases, such as attempted murder, to mediation despite the victim or their representatives requesting the formal resolution of the case through judicial actors.

Throughout the reporting period, the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice made announcements regarding support it provided to victims of domestic violence. For example, on 23 December, the *de facto* Ministry announced via a post on X that its ombudsmen had “resolved a dispute between two families over domestic violence”, stating that “At the meeting, the ombudsmen called on both parties to be fair and respect each other’s rights, saying: Respect for Islamic principles protects society from problems.”¹⁰ UNAMA has previously reported on the use of mediation by the *de facto* authorities to resolve domestic violence complaints, a practice which could entail human rights violations if it does not function in a manner compatible with international human rights law.¹¹

UNAMA also spoke with LGBTIQ individuals who reported experiencing arbitrary arrest, torture and sexual violence carried out by *de*

facto officials in places of detention.

Civilian harm

Between October and December, civilians were harmed due to deliberate attacks claimed by ISKP, the National Resistance Front and other armed groups:

- On 5 October in Takhar, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in front of a high school, wounding four girls, two boys, an adult man and two *de facto* police officers. The National Resistance Front claimed responsibility for the attack,¹² stating the target was Mullah Noor Mohammad, an official of the *de facto* Ministry of Interior.
- On 23 October in Kabul city, PD1, an IED placed under a handcart exploded, killing two people (a 16-year-old boy and an adult man) and wounding 14 others (eight men, three women, one girl and two boys). There was no claim of responsibility for the incident.
- On 3 November in Sar-e-Pul city, an IED exploded in Sakhizada Marketplace, wounding 18 people (12 men, three women, two girls and a boy). There was no claim of responsibility for the incident.
- On 21 November in Baghlan province, Nahrin district, gunmen shot and killed 11 adult men. The victims were followers of Sufism who were worshipping in a shrine at the time of the attack. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On 11 December, in Kabul city, PD7, inside the *de facto* Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, a suicide IED killed the *de facto* Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Khalil-Ur-Rahman Haqqani. At least three other employees of the *de facto* Ministry were killed and four wounded. ISKP

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/12/afghanistan-licenses-ngos-must-not-be-revoked>

¹⁰ <https://x.com/MOPVPE1/status/1871145135355875711>

¹¹ https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/the_handling_of_complaints_of_gbvawg_english_141223.pdf (UNAMA, 2023).

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/nrfafg1>

claimed responsibility for the attack.

- On 21 December, in Takhar province, Taloqan city, an IED placed in a garbage bin exploded, injuring a civilian man. The Afghan Liberation Front claimed responsibility for the attack via its X page, stating that the target was the *de facto* police.¹³
- On 28 December, in Kabul city, PD15, an IED exploded, killing a civilian man and wounding four others. The National Resistance Front claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that the target was the *de facto* Ministry of Interior and denying that any civilians or NRF members were harmed in the incident.¹⁴

Explosive remnants of war also continue to cause civilian harm, with children most of the victims. UNAMA recorded 64 casualties (eight girls, 39 boys, one woman, 16 men) due to explosive remnants of war. For example, on 19 October in Ghazni province, Qarabagh district, an unexploded ordnance detonated, killing three boys (aged 9, 11 and 15) and wounding three other boys (aged 5, 6 and 8) as well as one adult male. The incident happened while they were harvesting potatoes and hit the unexploded ordnance with their shovel.

Cross-border incidents

Cross-border incidents in Paktika and Paktya provinces resulted in civilian casualties in Afghanistan:

- In the night of 24 December, in Barmal district, airstrikes by Pakistani military forces on multiple villages, including Margha, Laman, Angor Ada, Charkhoorhai Ada, Tangai, Pasa Maela, and Wazirgee, resulted in civilian casualties. At least 45 people were killed (30 children, eight women and seven men) and eight wounded (six children and two women). On 25 December, the spokesperson for the *de*

facto authorities, Zabihullah Mujahid, told Azadi radio that 46 people had been killed and six wounded in the airstrikes, with most of the victims being women and children.

- In the morning of 28 December, in Paktya province, Dand-e Patan district, cross border firing between *de facto* security forces and Pakistani military forces resulted in civilian casualties. On the Afghan side of the border, three adult men were killed and six were wounded, reportedly as a result of mortar fired by Pakistan.

In response, the Embassy of Pakistan in Afghanistan informed UNAMA that: “Pakistan’s concerns regarding the interim Afghan authorities’ failure to act against TTP, enjoying safe havens on Afghan soil, and about the terrorist attacks being planned and orchestrated on the Afghan side of the border, are well documented and are known in the public domain” and noted “unprovoked firing on Pakistani security installations and personnel from across the border”.¹⁵

Death penalty and corporal punishment

Between 1 October and 31 December, UNAMA Human Rights documented judicial corporal punishment against at least 194 individuals (150 men, 39 women, 4 boys and 1 girl). For example, on 5 November, in Jawzjan province, Sherberghan city, the *de facto* authorities publicly flogged 22 people (four women, 18 men) who had been convicted of adultery, narcotics and alcohol-related offences. The punishment was implemented following the confirmation of their sentences by the *de facto* Supreme Court and took place in the presence of *de facto* officials and local residents.

On 13 November in Paktya province, Gardez city, a man was publicly executed in the sports stadium. According to the statement

¹³ <https://x.com/FREEDOMFRONTAFG/status/1870517104237228072>

¹⁴ <https://x.com/NRFafg/status/1872934639926448481>

¹⁵ The Embassy of Pakistan in Afghanistan also informed UNAMA that in December 2024 there were 22 civilian casualties on the Pakistani side of the border due to “indiscriminate firing” by *de facto* security forces. These figures have not been independently verified by UNAMA.

released by the *de facto* Supreme Court,¹⁶ he had been convicted of murdering a person with a gun and an order to implement the death penalty was issued and approved by all three judicial stages of the *de facto* Military Court (Primary, Appellate and Supreme) before receiving final approval by the Taliban leader.

The victim's family was given the opportunity to forgive the individual¹⁷ through mediation by the *de facto* Ministers in attendance, however they refused, resulting in the application of *qisas* punishment (execution). A member of the murdered person's family reportedly carried out the execution by shooting.

A delegation of *de facto* authorities, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, *de facto* Minister of Interior, Alhaj Khalilur Rahman Haqqani, the late *de facto* Minister of Refugees and Returnees attended the execution as well as local residents.

The *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to UNAMA that: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan always strives to strictly implement the provisions of Sharia and preserve the principles of justice in society."

Freedom of expression

On 26 November, UNAMA/OHCHR published a report entitled "Media Freedom in Afghanistan", covering the period from 15 August 2021 to 30 September 2024.¹⁸ The report found that the *de facto* authorities' measures in interfering with media content and the internal operation of media outlets have significantly diminished media freedoms in Afghanistan. Women in media are subject to additional restrictions by the *de facto* authorities and have more difficulties in accessing information than their male counterparts. These restrictions have confined female journalists mainly to

duties at the office. Female journalists are often not invited to press conferences organized by the *de facto* authorities or are asked to move to the back of the room. Some officials of the *de facto* authorities refuse to talk to or to be interviewed by women. The challenges faced by the media are compounded by a loss of revenue and the withdrawal of donor support since the Taliban takeover of the country.

In response to the findings of the report, on 26 November, the spokesperson for the *de facto* authorities stated that "no media were subjected to violations"¹⁹ and the *de facto* Ministry of Information and Culture stated that "no journalist has been detained as a journalist".²⁰ The *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stated that the report was not objective and rejected its findings.²¹

Impact of the Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on freedom of expression

The enforcement of the PVPV Law has further impacted media freedoms. The PVPV Law tasks *de facto* Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice inspectors with ensuring that media content complies with Sharia, does not insult Muslims and does not contain images of living beings. Several media outlets have been forced to suspend programming due to enforcement of this provision:

- As a result of the prohibition on the broadcast of images of living beings, in Kandahar, the public broadcaster RTA closed its visual programming; in Helmand province, one private television station ceased operation and RTA broadcasts without images of living beings.
- In Takhar province, RTA suspended its television programs on 16 October for over a month, resuming regular broadcasting in early December. Some

¹⁶ https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1856622580318216684/photo/1/; https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1856628140325421561

¹⁷ https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1856622580318216684/photo/1/; https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1856628140325421561

¹⁸ Full report available here: <https://unama.unmissions.org/human-rights-monitoring-and-reporting-0>.

¹⁹ <https://x.com/TOLONews/status/1861395647074844785>

²⁰ <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-191856>

²¹ <https://www.ariananews.af/iea-rejects-new-unama-report-on-media-restrictions-in-afghanistan/>

television stations in Takhar and Badghis provinces continued to broadcast their programs without images of living beings.

- The *de facto* Departments of Information and Culture in several provinces have verbally instructed journalists not to create, broadcast or publish images of living beings.
- On 4 December, in Kabul, the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice accused Arezo TV of “dubbing vulgar serials and programs that violated Islamic and Afghan principles and traditions.”²² The station’s operations were suspended and several of its employees arrested. They were released in mid-December, however Arezo TV remains closed.

The *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to UNAMA that: “The Ministry of Information and Culture...states that no official documents have been received regarding the media bans imposed by the mentioned provinces [Kandahar, Takhar and Baghdis]. The Ministry believes that the issue should be evaluated based on accurate evidence and verified information, and so far, these claims are only considered rumors.”

The *de facto* authorities continue to implement the PVPV Law through awareness raising within the *de facto* authorities, providing guidance and advice to the broader population and active enforcement. UNAMA has documented arbitrary arrests and detentions related to what is now codified in the Law, infringing on people’s freedom of expression. Arrests of men who shaved their beards shorter than a fist length; barbers who provided ‘unapproved’ haircuts and beard trimming; and individuals who played music and took photos and videos during weddings were recorded.

Administration of justice

On 2 October, Tolo News reported that the spokesperson for the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has stated that in the first six months of the current year (March to September), over 1,700 complaints were registered with the *de facto* Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Complaints Commission including criticisms regarding the misconduct of “Islamic Emirate enforcers and military personnel,” with the majority being civil complaints. Of these, more than 250 cases have reportedly been resolved, and the remaining complaints remain under review. The spokesperson added that citizens, both inside and outside the country, can freely submit their complaints regarding the performance of government institutions, as well as misconduct by military personnel and enforcers, through email, the 191 hotline, or in writing to the Ministry’s Complaints Commission for appropriate action.²³

On 12 October, the *de facto* Ministry of Justice announced publication of another Official Gazette issued 23 September, containing one law and four decrees.²⁴ Of note, the Decree on Courts’ Judgments dated 26 August 2024 outlines a procedure for higher courts to review and correct lower court judgments issued contrary to the law, whether because of contradictions in the ruling or their reliance on disputed confessions.

On 19 October, the *de facto* Director-General of the Office of Prison Administration (OPA) stated that about 11,000 to 11,500 convicted men and at least 1,000 convicted women are imprisoned in the country’s prisons, including 100 foreign citizens who have committed various crimes; and around 12,000 accused are awaiting the court’s

²² <https://x.com/MOPVPE1/status/1864560398776541358>

²³ <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-190996>

²⁴ <https://x.com/MojAfghanistan/status/1845050610388721886>. The Official Gazette No (1445) dated 23 September 2024 contains the Law on Industrial parks; the Decree on prohibition of selling returned lands from usurpers; a Decree on publication on issues relevant to system; a Decree on Courts Judgments/ decisions; and a Decree on appointment of a delegation to supervise emirate corporations and approval of the structure/ Tashkil of Directorate General of Emirati Corporations. Available at: <http://laws.moj.gov.af/ShowLawPersian.aspx>.

final verdict. A committee for transferring Afghan prisoners from abroad has been established, composed of representatives of the *de facto* Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Justice, the *de facto* Supreme Court, and the *de facto* Office of Prison Administration, with transfers of prisoners from several countries to Afghanistan having taken place.²⁵

On 1 December, the *de facto* Supreme Court reported that its *de facto* General Directorate of Scrutiny and Studies was preparing a Judicial Code of Conduct for judges; had prepared a Regulation on the Rights and Privileges of the Judicial Cadre and a bill on the *de facto* Military Courts to be submitted to the *de facto* Supreme Court High Council for consideration, and sent a draft regulation on “contemporary investigation evidence” to the *de facto* Judicial Deputy of the Supreme Court.²⁶

In December, new decrees approved by the Taliban Leader were announced, including:

- On 21 December, a decree mandating the establishment of special courts dedicated to resolving pensioners' retirement rights in accordance with both Sharia and existing laws;²⁷
- On 25 December, a decree prohibiting human trafficking, that authorizes the *de facto* Ministry of Interior to identify and arrest human traffickers, and refer them to military courts, with cooperation as needed with the *de facto* Ministry of Defence and General Directorate of Intelligence to prevent trafficking. Other *de facto* ministries including, inter alia, the *de facto* Ministries of Guidance, Hajj and Religious Affairs, of Education, of Higher Education, of Information and Culture, of the Promotion of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, and of Borders and Tribal Affairs are required to ensure awareness-raising of the prohibition

among the population.²⁸

On 28 December, a decree mandating that newly constructed buildings must not have any windows through which their neighbors' courtyard, kitchen, well and other areas used by women are visible. The decree states that owners of existing buildings with such windows must “avoid harm to neighbors” by constructing walls which obstruct the windows. The decree tasks municipalities and “other relevant bodies” to monitor the construction of new buildings to ensure compliance with the decree.²⁹

²⁵ <https://www.ariananews.af/about-12000-men-and-1000-women-being-detained-in-countrys-prisons-yusuf-mestri/>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGc_tzDhYR4

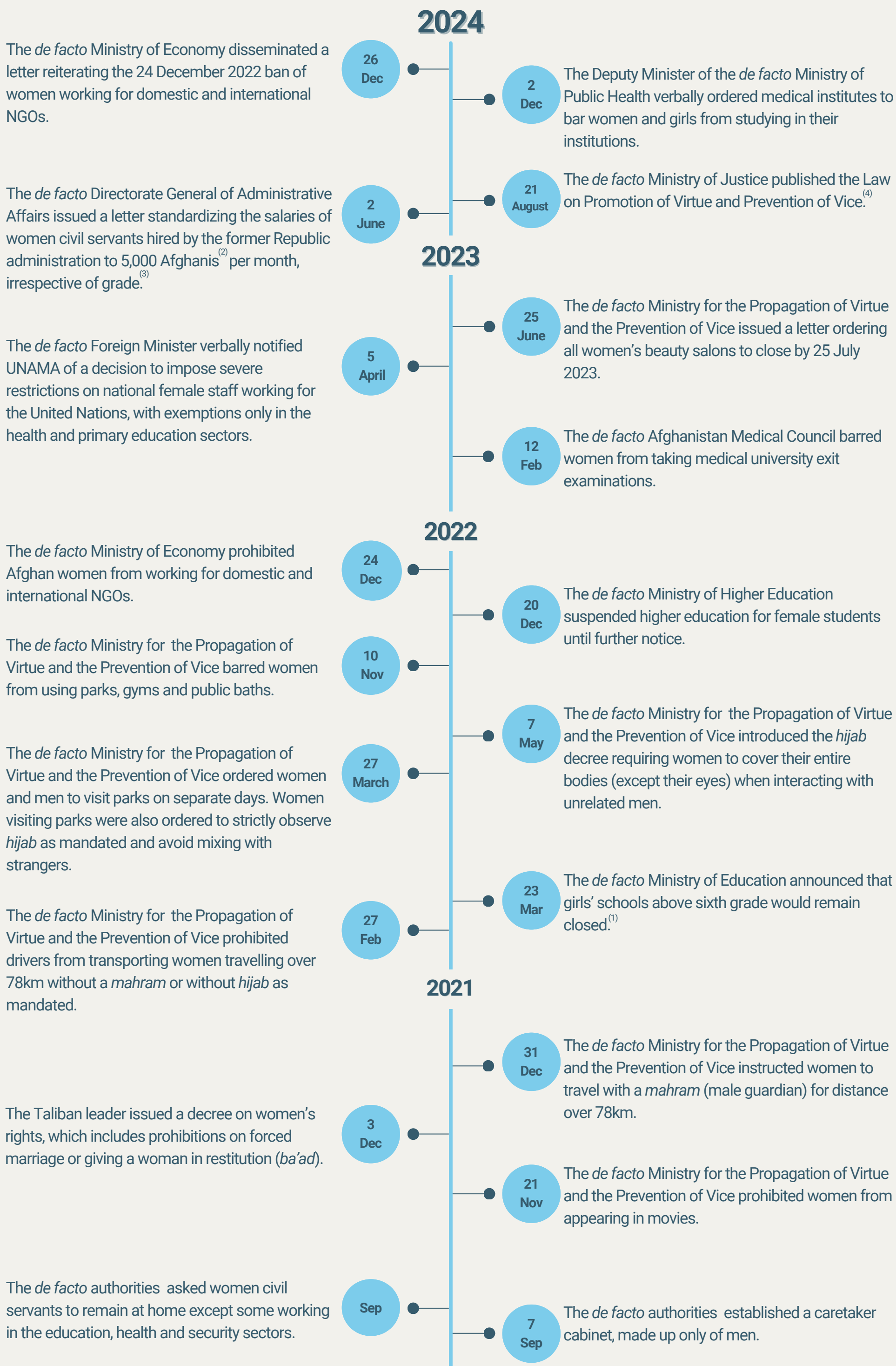
²⁶ https://x.com/SupremeCourt_af/status/1863190205647233496

²⁷ <https://x.com/bnaenglish/status/1870403430902075444>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73sAEgm0r5U>; <https://x.com/MojAfghanistan/status/1871784514655252674>

²⁹ <https://x.com/FitratHamd/status/1872989789424894275>; https://x.com/ARG_1880/status/1873001062053167479

ANNEX: TIMELINE OF DECISIONS BY THE *DE FACTO* AUTHORITIES IMPACTING WOMEN AND GIRLS



[1] Schools for girls above sixth grade were initially closed in September 2021.

[2] It is approximately \$70 USD.

[3] On 7 July 2024, the *de facto* Ministry of Finance issued a letter clarifying that the 2 June 2024 directive only applies to women civil servants "who do not attend work daily or do not perform their duties according to their job description", referring to women civil servants who were asked to stay home by the *de facto* authorities after the Taliban takeover.

[4] For more information on the Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, see Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: July - September 2024 Update, available at: <https://unama.unmissions.org/human-rights-monitoring-and-reporting-0>.