

Humanitarian response to Afghanistan must not do harm - 10 urgent, practical steps

Since September 20, 2021 the [International Civil Society Action Network](#) (ICAN) and its partners:

- Mahbouba Seraj, Founder, Afghan Women Skills and Development Center (AWSDC);
- Wazhma Frogh, Founder and CEO, Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO);
- Fawzia Koofi, Member of Parliament;
- Zarqa Yaftali, Founder/Director, Women and Children's Legal Research Foundation;
- Hassina Neekzad, Founder/Director, Afghan Women's Organization for Equality (AWOE);
- Quharmanna Kakar, Founder, Women for Peace and Participation (WPP);
- Mary Akrami and Roshan Mashal, Co-Founders, Afghan Women's Network (AWN);
- Horia Mosadiq, Director, Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization; and
- Mustafa Babak, Afghan-American Foundation

have reached out to the governments of Sweden, Norway, Canada and the UK; the European External Action Service (EEAS); UNDP; and USAID regarding the urgent and critical need for gender-responsive humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to ensure that no additional harm is done to women and girls.

Given the gendered segregation of society that the Taliban has already instigated, the delivery of aid to women and girls will be even more highly dependent on female Afghan aid workers and local women-led civil society organizations (CSOs). Such organizations have traditionally been the key conduits to reaching the most needy and marginalized sectors of society. They are more essential now. Yet the leaders and staff of such organizations, along with women in local governance, justice, health, education and security sectors, who are essential for the provision of safety and services, are themselves being targeted.

Given the complexity of the issues we have offered 10 practical steps that the UN and other international humanitarian actors can take in designing and implementing their humanitarian response:

1. All UN Humanitarian delegations must include senior women officials and personnel (male and female) with understanding of local languages/cultural context, and UN Women representation.
2. Afghan women with experience in the delivery of aid (different sectors) must be included in the negotiations with the Taliban representatives and local consultations. UN delegations must meet with women leaders of CSOs to have direct insight into the reality of their lives and needs now.
3. The protection of the life and property, and the freedom of movement of the Afghan women CSO leaders and organization staff must be guaranteed by the Taliban. These women and others representing the different professions and provinces are critical to the effective design and delivery of aid, given their knowledge, access and expertise.
4. The UN must also ensure that local women-led CSOs active in community aid, development and peace and security are able to operate, move freely and safely throughout the country and

receive funds to sustain their work. The UN and international actors must be able to hire Afghan women to provide for the health, education, livelihoods, and security of Afghan communities.

5. Direct cash transfer to families (through remittances or charity donations) must be supported and enabled. Afghans should have safe and unfettered access to their bank accounts, savings and services such as Western Union.
6. Aid programmes must include services and materials to address the health, sanitation and nutritional needs of women and girls, including but not limited to reproductive health care.
7. Aid must be delivered and safely accessible to all communities especially those from religious and ethnic communities (Hazara, Tajik, etc.) and with attention and clear plans on reaching women and girls in those communities, in cities and provincial areas.
8. The Taliban leadership must expressly prohibit any violence, harassment, threats or exploitation of the country's population, especially women and girls, religious and ethnic communities (Tajik, Hezara and others) and other minorities.
9. The security and protection of women to work in government, in the legal, judicial, and security sectors, and those active in civil society (media, arts, education and health), and receive and retain salaries must be guaranteed. In line with the Taliban's own stated commitments (pt.8).
10. The Taliban's conditions/demands that women must have a Mahram to go to work, access public life and services, is untenable, and a de facto prison sentence for countless women/girls – especially female headed households. The UN and donors must not accept such restrictions.