EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Afghanistan

Country Focus Report

2025

Credit: Zabihullah Habibi

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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

The reporting period for this report covers all of 2025. Since the Taliban's armed seizure of power in August 2021, the de facto authorities (DFA) have increasingly used authoritarian methods to maintain control of Afghanistan. Political parties and discussions are banned, the media is heavily controlled, civic space is closed, and the Taliban uses ruthless methods to stamp out any remaining pockets of free thought or opposition. Trends over the last twelve months include increased digital surveillance, additional controls on the media including the banning of audio-visual broadcasts, and the stricter enforcement of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law (PVPV) that was passed in 2024.

Freedom of expression, assembly and association are now completely forbidden by Taliban policy, and human rights defenders (HRDs), women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and journalists are routinely harassed, unlawfully arrested and detained, and even tortured and killed. Since the takeover, the Taliban has forcefully built and implemented a system of gender apartheid that has severely restricted the rights of women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ persons, to the point of near total erasure from society.

Women and girls are subject to multiple layers of restrictions. The Taliban has banned them from schools above grade six, from universities and all forms of training, including medical training. The vast majority of women are not allowed to work. Even where there are exceptions – for example in healthcare – the DFA impose so many requirements on dress, movement and chaperoning that even women in exempted professions often find it impossible to continue their work. Women, particularly those from ethnic minorities, are frequently harassed, beaten, detained and subjected to sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) in detention for wearing the 'wrong' kind of hijab or doing food shopping without a chaperone.

The situation has led CSAs and CSOs (broadly defined to include all those listed above) to self-censor, forcing many to operate from exile, work in secrecy, or halt their activities altogether. Although the de facto authorities have undermined all CSAs' work, the impact on WHRDs has been more severe as they are targeted both for their work and their gender. The December 2022 ban on women working for NGOs is a clear example of this.

The Taliban have also dismantled the legal framework that once protected and supported the work of CSAs. Soon after seizing power, the DFA effectively suspended the constitution and legal system that was in place prior to August 2021. They rule by decree, the most expansive of which to date is the 2024 PVPV law, which establishes the Taliban's version of Sharia law (Islamic Law). The funding cuts from European and US governments have further eroded the enabling environment for civil society. What little funding is available is hindered by the Taliban's actions, which include the demanding of bribes from humanitarian workers to allow

them to do their jobs. Political culture and public discourse on civil society are generally negative, often portraying international NGOs as spies for Western governments and CSAs as anti-Taliban. Additionally, both CSAs and citizens are surveilled digitally and physically, and misinformation is widespread.

One of the numerous crises buffeting Afghanistan during 2025 was the mass forced return of a staggering number of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan. Between January and December 2025, UNHCR documented the return of 2,869,900 people, of whom 1,401,800 (or 49%) were deported. While the remainder are classified as 'voluntary' returns, the vast majority of those individuals and families felt forced to return because of the hostile environments created by the Iranian and Pakistani governments. It's a reflection of the tumultuous year that was 2025 that this vast population movement and resulting humanitarian needs received hardly any attention on the international stage.

Many members of Afghan civil society who had taken refuge in Pakistan and Iran after the Taliban takeover in 2021 were caught up in the arrests and deportations. In November and December 2025 alone, 12 Afghan media workers (including one woman) and two of their children were detained by Pakistani authorities[1]. Some have likely already been forcibly returned to Afghanistan, while others remain at imminent risk of deportation. Journalists and civil society activists are at particular risk of reprisal attacks by the de facto authorities on their return to Afghanistan. For example, an HRD who was deported from Iran on 20 August 2025 was arrested just four days after he arrived in Afghanistan; he was reportedly beaten during his arrest and subjected to torture while in detention.

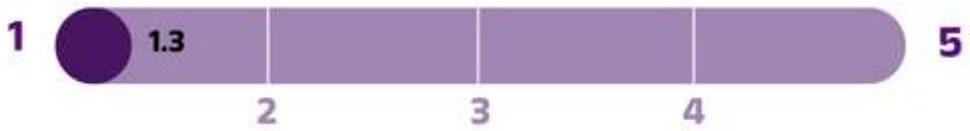
[1] Case details documented by an Afghan human rights organisation.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: [2]



1.1 Freedom of Association

A handful of civil society groups with connections to the regime are permitted to operate in a very limited way, but any groups working on human rights, democracy-promotion or engaged in genuine civic debate are effectively criminalised. Such groups have applications for official registration denied, and are subject to harassment, intimidation or arrest if they attempt to meet, network or organise informally.

Some members of civil society have tried to carry on their work in secret, but the Taliban's increased capacity for digital surveillance combined with its growing networks of paid informants made this extremely dangerous.

While civic space is closed for all Afghans, the impact on female members of civil society has been particularly egregious because of the DFA's policy of gender apartheid. Women CSAs and NGO staff have been prevented from working, with terrible personal and societal consequences. Many professional women have lost their livelihoods and face destitution, while their absence from the workforce has severely hindered efforts to respond to Afghanistan's multiple socio-economic and humanitarian crises.

1.2 Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

[2] *This is a rebased score derived from the CIVICUS Monitor rating published in December 2025.*

While street demonstrations by women's groups were relatively common in the early months of Taliban rule, the DFA's brutal response means public protests are now extremely rare. Dozens of women protesters were beaten and detained during protests; some former detainees report having been subjected to SGBV while in detention. Others were abducted from their homes in night raids by Taliban intelligence after they had been identified as leaders within the women's movement. Police officials often denied that these women had been taken by the DFA, only for them to turn up in General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) custody. HRDs and CSAs who are men, and especially those who support women's rights and education, have also been subject to arbitrary detentions and torture.

After the wave of arrests of women protesters, women's rights activists began meeting in secret at people's homes to hold indoor protests. However, the DFA has, at times, managed to target even these gatherings and arrest participants. Even this entirely peaceful activity is now denied to women activists. Women's groups then turned to the internet as a place where they could virtually assemble, but growing digital surveillance and harassment means many no longer feel comfortable engaging in online spaces that they previously considered safe. Activists report increasing incidents of what they believe to be paid informants infiltrating online discussion groups and reporting members to the DFA.

1.3 Freedom of Expression

Over the past year dozens of CSAs, NGO workers, media workers, social media influencers, writers, schoolteachers, university students and religious scholars were detained for peacefully expressing their opinions. Many civilians were also harassed, threatened and/or detained because of comments they had posted on social media.

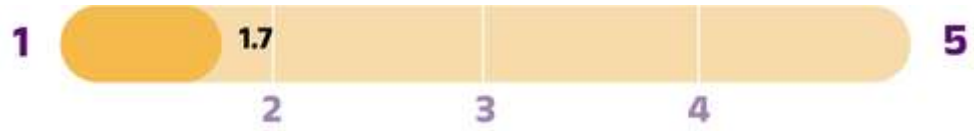
Testimonies from former detainees suggest that detainees are routinely subject to torture and other cruel and inhuman punishments. Treatment is particularly brutal in detention centres run by the GDI, which is responsible for many arrests of members of civil society. Women and girls detained by the GDI are at high risk of being subjected to SGBV.

In recent months, several detainees including journalists and social media content creators have been forced to record confession videos. These were then shared on social media channels that are supportive of the Taliban.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



2.1 Registration

As discussed above, the DFA in theory suspended all laws and government procedures when they seized power. However, in practice, the DFA still works through a ministry structure, and many operating procedures are still functioning, albeit with modifications linked to Taliban ideology. CSOs can, in theory, register with the Ministry of Economy or Ministry of Justice, depending on what type of work they are involved in. However, in practice, the process is unclear, inconsistent and heavily influenced by ideological factors. One CSA reported that in the 2024-5 period, new registrations had been effectively frozen. Many previously registered organisations haven't been able to renew their licences.

CSAs report that there are two key exclusions in the current process that effectively ban organisations working on human rights, women's rights, open civic debate, or anything considered pro-democracy. These are firstly that CSOs must not be women-led[3]; organisations with women directors were banned by the Taliban soon after their takeover (and women were later officially banned from working for NGOs in any capacity). Secondly, CSOs must not have anything related to democracy, human rights or freedoms in their visions, mission statements or project plans.

Organisations applying for approval must be non-political, and Taliban officials reportedly investigate the opinions and views of those trying to register. CSAs report that the Ministry of Justice requires that groups have the 'right thoughts and minds', they should be pro-Taliban and educated in madrassas. There is ambiguity in the policies, making it easy for the Taliban to reject applications by those they know to have been involved in genuine civil society activities in the past.

[3] Local human rights organisations reported from the first half of 2022 that women were no longer permitted to be directors of NGOs. This preceded the December 2022 ban on women working for NGOs in any capacity.

One CSA described being told by officials at the Ministry of Economy that they must not include anything in their application form or plans that 'go against Islam or Sharia'. This highly subjective criterion provides Taliban officials with wide scope to reject applications. CSOs reported that the only applications that were successful were those saying they would work solely on agricultural, economic or medical projects. Any applications referring to civil society or planning events such as seminars were rejected. Education used to be another area where it was feasible to work, but since 2024 the Taliban has been closing education projects because of fears that students were being corrupted by western-style education, including IT and English lessons.

2.2 Operational environment

For those groups that manage to secure an official registration, the challenges do not end there. The operational environment is unpredictable and subject to policy changes, from one month to the next or from one official to another. CSOs with official status report that they are required to get approval from one or more ministries for each project they want to carry out. Timelines for these approvals are extensive and are not compatible with donor timelines and requirements.

CSOs report that getting project approval from the Ministry of Economy might take between four and six months, after which they would then forward the project to the Ministry of Health or other relevant line ministry for additional approvals. For a one-year project it is unlikely they would receive approval within the entire project timeline. The project approval process not only suffers from such logistical challenges, but projects must also align with DFA priorities, which severely limits the types of projects that are likely to be permitted.

CSOs also reported that the project approval process has become another avenue for corruption, with Taliban officials demanding bribes to give a positive response. One CSO mentioned that the Taliban receives at least 10% of the budget for many officially approved projects. Some CSOs mentioned that they have been forced to conduct projects outside the formal approval process because projects would otherwise never get started. Some CSOs have been able to conduct impactful work by sidestepping some of the formalities, but this comes with risks to those carrying out the work.

In a different example, organisations that had been able to keep working on psychosocial support in the early days of the Taliban takeover have now been told that the Taliban no longer recognise mental health as a public health issue, so their projects will no longer be approved.

2.3 Protection from interference

CSOs have no protection from interference from the DFA. Legal protections that existed during the previous government have been abolished. CSOs are harassed by various government agencies including technical ministries, the GDI, and the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (MPVPV). Taliban officials interacting with CSOs do not follow any transparent framework and act with impunity.

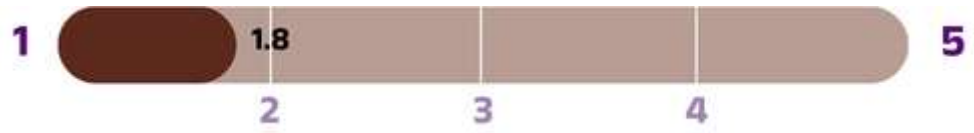
CSOs have been periodically raided, had their staff arrested and tortured, had their resources confiscated or destroyed, had projects cancelled, or have been closed entirely.[4] Many CSOs and NGOs have also had their bank accounts frozen following the Taliban takeover.

[4] Information documented by Afghan human rights groups including via interviews with former detainees.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



3.1 Accessibility

The arrival of the second Trump administration in January 2025 had immediate and far-reaching implications for Afghanistan. Trump's global freeze on international aid resulted in many NGOs and civil society groups working in and on Afghanistan receiving 'stop work' orders. Both local and international NGOs that were reliant on US funding were forced to suspend projects and lay off staff. The US had been providing around 44% of all aid to multilateral institutions in Afghanistan (i.e. UNAMA, UNOCHA programmes and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund), vastly outspending all other donors and highlighting the dramatic implications of the freeze.

The cuts had a massive impact across the board, including on humanitarian assistance, food aid and the provision of healthcare. From early September to early December 2025, the health sector saw a 15% increase in women and children with malnutrition compared to the same period in 2024. 422 health facilities were closed, affecting 3.08 million Afghans across 30 provinces. Healthcare workers report growing rates of maternal mortality. No figures are available for this metric, in part because the annual health survey was previously paid for by USAID and therefore was not finished due to US aid cuts.

It is not only the US that has cut funds; many previously generous European donors including the UK and Sweden have also announced plans to dramatically reduce their budgets for Afghanistan.

3.2 Effectiveness

In addition to the general drop in available funding, CSOs pointed to other challenges in the funding landscape. These challenges included 'hyper-prioritisation', meaning funding from

various donors was only available for humanitarian projects, with extremely strict donor conditions and risk aversion, plus banking and sanctions barriers.

Even before the aforementioned major funding cuts, donor requirements were already difficult and restrictive for groups inside the country; there were significant limitations in terms of risk assessments, due diligence, and the practical challenges of transferring funds in a context of sanctions and suspicions about people receiving money from abroad. One CSO was pressured by an international donor to use an auditing company, even though the CSO knew the auditing company had ties to the de facto authorities and would potentially put them at risk.

CSOs understand the need for careful vetting of organisations applying for funding, because they report that some pro-Taliban groups or individuals have set up NGOs with a view to accessing donor funds fraudulently (statistics from the Ministry of Economy suggest that 781 NGOs have been newly registered since August 2021[5] with a view to accessing humanitarian funds). Nevertheless, once civil society groups have shown themselves to be trustworthy, CSOs have requested that donors use reporting procedures that reflect the reality of the operating environment inside Afghanistan (see also Recommendations section).

The competitive funding environment and growing donor demands also make it extremely difficult for smaller grassroots groups, particularly in rural areas, to win funding when they have to compete with large, better-resourced organisations. In previous years, most Afghan CSOs accessed funding via INGOs, so they don't have relationships or trust built up with institutional donors.

3.3 Sustainability

The remaining funding available to Afghan CSOs is short-term with very low sustainability. Funding is only available on a project basis. Most donors are not willing to pay administrative costs, making it difficult for organisations to survive. The inability of female staff to operate also makes it harder to get funding, because many organisations will only provide funding to CSOs with a certain ratio of female staff and/or female directors.

One CSO mentioned a proposal he had heard of where donors would provide small amounts of funds to enable the CSOs to exist and to function, even if they can't work in a traditional project way. The result was that NGOs managed to survive despite the restrictive climate. There are exceptions like these, but they are very rare.

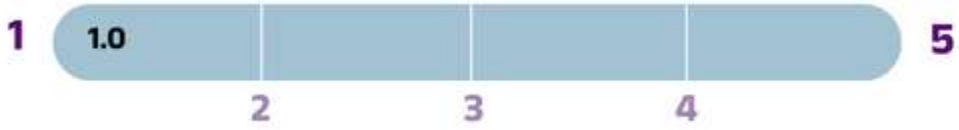
The initial cut in US funds to Afghanistan was part of a global policy rather than being Afghanistan-specific. However, the fact that Afghanistan was only one of two countries explicitly banned from receiving new funds announced in late 2025 suggested the cut in US funding would continue for the foreseeable future. An announcement on 29 December 2025 that the US was allocating USD 2 billion for UN humanitarian programmes globally stated specifically that none of the funds could go to Afghanistan. Trump administration officials claimed this stipulation was a result of aid funds being diverted to the Taliban.

[5] Information gathered by a local civil society organisation.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



4.1 Transparency

Public access to government information has sharply deteriorated since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021. Since then, the Taliban has dismantled the legal and institutional framework that once guaranteed the public's right to information, including abolishing the Access to Information Law and dissolving the Access to Information Commission. This decline continued through 2025. In its 2024 assessment, Freedom House gave Afghanistan a score of 0 out of 4 for government openness and transparency – the lowest possible rating. Although the 2025 ranking has not yet been released, trends suggest that the ranking is unlikely to improve.

This information has been confirmed by CSAs and journalists. Media reports indicate that access to government information is highly restricted, with women facing even greater barriers due to gender-based restrictions and discrimination. Often, the information that is available contains accuracy, time or verification faults. Civil society does not have access to public data or budgetary and policy documents, and even when CSAs obtain permission to submit inquiries to government officials, those officials frequently refuse to respond.

4.2 Participation

Participation mechanisms, including parliament, have also been virtually eliminated. Besides ruling by decrees that allow no input from civil society – or, more widely, any actor that is not affiliated with the Taliban – female journalists and CSAs face mounting restrictions to access governmental press events, including workplace segregation and strict dress codes. However, this is not limited to women; all CSAs have minimal access to consultative forums on policy.

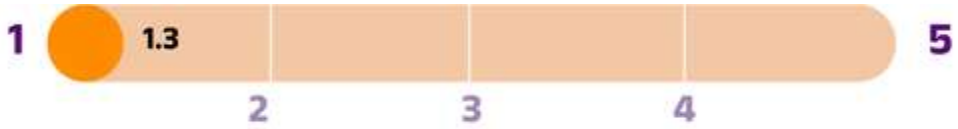
4.3 Accountability

With participation mechanisms virtually eliminated, and with civil society monitoring, reporting, or advocacy not resulting in corrective action, accountability mechanisms have been effectively abolished. There is little expectation of legal or institutional mechanisms for the de facto authorities to provide clear, detailed and transparent feedback on how CSAs' input influences their decision-making processes. With transparency sidelined, feedback, redress, and accountability channels are completely absent. Appeal processes are informal and largely dependent on CSAs' contacts in the Taliban regime. Independent oversight bodies, courts, and media are either non-operational or heavily restricted.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



5.1 Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

Since the de facto authorities' retaking of power in 2021, civil society's legitimacy depends solely on providing humanitarian assistance. Government rhetoric claims that NGOs and other civil society organisations that engage in activities beyond humanitarian assistance – and even some of those – are portrayed as foreign spies. For example, in August 2025, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid accused the United Nations (UN) of spying for foreign countries and for producing reports that were unreliable and portrayed the situation of Afghanistan to be in a worse state than it actually is.

Local media outlets can rarely spread information that has not been previously approved by the de facto authorities, including about the work of Afghan CSAs inside and outside the country. Therefore, public discourse on civil society is highly restrictive and controlled. Independent media space has shrunk further in the past year, and public discussion of civil society's role is discouraged. Authorities often frame rights-based CSOs as incompatible with local values or foreign-influenced, preventing constructive dialogue.

Most of the CSAs' perspectives, ideas and work that infiltrate the societal and political debates are framed as alien and anti-*Sharia*. In this context, civil society actors are consistently excluded from decision-making processes. CSAs report that the de facto authorities have made their position clear: civil society has no role in decision-making and is not permitted to participate in any political discussions.

That said, CSAs have also reported that some CSOs that align closely with the regime or maintain strong connections to Taliban members are granted greater operational leeway. However, such cases remain rare exceptions. The prevailing reality is that CSAs face severe restrictions in establishing dialogue with the de facto authorities.

5.2 Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perception of civil society is mixed. Humanitarian and service-oriented organisations retain some public trust due to their role in meeting basic needs. However, advocacy-oriented CSOs face stigma, fear-based disengagement, and reduced visibility. Civic engagement is largely informal and constrained by fear of repercussions.

People or groups that are not aligned with the Taliban are completely sidelined from political processes, including civil society. Additionally, CSAs report that citizens have increasingly lower expectations that civil society can impact or influence the current regime's policies, particularly at the high level. The use of violence as a reprisal for civil society actions also discourages the involvement of local communities in civil society's actions. This is further compounded by gender-based restrictions, as women (who are often the most interested in participating in civil society events) face significant travel limitations.

That said, civil society remains able to participate – albeit in limited capacity – in community-level councils and assemblies. However, this participation has a limited scope, as tribal and religious leaders only influence community-level policies. Additionally, the Taliban has also targeted these figures for their work in civil society, subjecting them to arbitrary detentions, torture and beatings.

5.3 Civic equality and inclusion

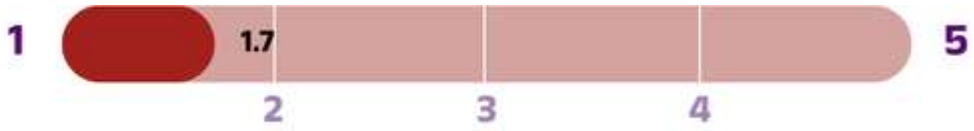
Afghanistan's current legal and social context significantly limits civic equality and inclusion. Women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities are excluded from most public spaces and decision-making roles. Organisations representing these groups are either banned, forced to operate underground, or dissolved. The past year has seen further erosion of inclusive civic space, particularly for women-led initiatives.

These groups face mounting legal, social and economic barriers that prevent their full participation in civic space. For example, CSAs report that dress-code and movement restrictions disproportionately affect WHRDs compared to their male counterparts, undermining their ability to carry out their work effectively, including conducting interviews and investigations and attending advocacy events and trainings. One measure civil society has adopted to address this situation is shifting a significant portion of its activities to online platforms.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



6.1 Digital Rights and Freedoms

The de facto authorities have severely curtailed the digital rights and freedoms of civil society. Online activism on open-access social media platforms is subject to extensive monitoring, intimidation, and harassment, particularly on issues related to women's rights and governance. CSAs report that de facto authorities are increasingly arresting activists, social media influencers, and other users in connection with online activity. Such incidents have been widely reported during 2024-2025 and have led to users self-censoring[6]; many individuals avoid sharing opinions on Facebook, Instagram, or other platforms, and NGOs keep a deliberately low profile and avoid public dissemination of activities and achievements. Online silence is increasingly seen as necessary for personal and organisational safety.

It is important to note that the online targeting of activists is gendered. WHRDs – both inside Afghanistan and in the diaspora – face increasing harassment, threats, cyberattacks and online bullying for advocating for women's rights. This is perpetrated by supporters of the Taliban both inside and outside Afghanistan, who harass and threaten women activists (both Afghanistan-based and in the diaspora). Online threats often translate into real-world fear, as attackers can easily identify workplaces and residences. Accessing law enforcement protection for cybercrime abroad remains difficult due to language and cultural barriers.

Widespread monitoring and intimidation extend beyond publicly shared social media content to also include information stored on personal devices, such as emails, phone conversations, and online documents. CSAs report that de facto authorities frequently stop individuals at security checkpoints and force them to provide access to the data on their phones. This has also led to CSAs having to hide or edit information to avoid being persecuted for it.

6.2 Digital Security and Privacy

[6] Interviews with former detainees.

Infrastructure for digital security and privacy in Afghanistan is severely underdeveloped. The DFA do not accept the concepts of digital security or privacy because they go against the Taliban's stated aim of imposing a system of Islamic Sharia on the Afghan population. For CSAs, this results in increased exposure to cyberattacks, surveillance, and online intimidation, with no institutional protection. Combined with limited access to training and resources to strengthen digital safety practices, these gaps have contributed to activists becoming increasingly vulnerable to surveillance, phishing attacks, and intimidation by de facto government-linked actors. The use of spyware and arbitrary data collection without consent is also a growing concern for CSAs.

CSAs have had to resort to encrypted platforms to communicate sensitive content, like WhatsApp. That said, many believe that, despite end-to-end encryption, there may still be ways for authorities to access communications, including by confiscating phones at checkpoints or when CSAs are detained. They have thus taken increased security precautions in daily life to avoid becoming vulnerable to communication intrusion. Some CSAs report working entirely from home, heavily securing phones and computers, and limiting their physical movement due to security concerns. However, even with these measures, most do not feel safe when accessing information or sharing data online. Other measures CSOs have taken to mitigate risks associated with digital security and privacy breaches include holding regular cybersecurity trainings and sharing safety tips with colleagues, constituencies, and beneficiaries.

6.3 Digital Accessibility

In Afghanistan, access to digital technologies is severely limited and varies by geography and gender. Internet access is significantly better in urban areas compared to rural areas. Key barriers in rural areas include affordability of devices and internet services, and limited digital literacy and infrastructure gaps. Overall, internet penetration in Afghanistan is low. Additionally, blackouts and telecom restrictions – at times at the hands of de facto authorities – drastically reduce connectivity.

In addition to surveillance fears, the de facto authorities have imposed internet outages, posing further obstacles to digital accessibility. These have been used in areas with significant resistance activity, to prevent resistance forces from being able to communicate with each other and/or to prevent news about Taliban security operations (and related human rights abuses) reaching media agencies outside the country. In an alarming step, the de facto authorities imposed a full internet shutdown on 29 September 2025 because of fears it was spreading 'vice'. The blanket cut was reversed after a couple of days when the move caused socio-economic chaos and other members of the Taliban leadership apparently objected. While there were no further repeats of the national level shutdown, internet services remained heavily restricted and subject to further cuts at the provincial level for the rest of 2025.

Women and other marginalised groups face additional cultural and economic barriers to digital literacy and secure use of online tools. Some examples include social restrictions, limited mobility, and exclusion from digital learning opportunities. These groups are therefore more likely to have low digital literacy.

This also affects civil society's access to the digital space, which also remains uneven. Many CSOs, particularly in rural regions, lack the infrastructure and digital literacy needed for effective online engagement. Organisational use of digital tools is further constrained by security risks and fear of monitoring. CSOs and individuals can access digital tools and platforms, but this access comes with constant fear of monitoring, surveillance, and retaliation, limiting meaningful digital participation.

C) Recommendations

To the International Community:

- Do not allow engagement with the Taliban to effectively normalise the extreme human rights abuses and violations that the de facto authorities are inflicting on the population. Ensure that engagement with the de facto authorities is mutually principled.

- Condemn and call for an end to Gender Apartheid in all contexts and support its inclusion in the Crimes Against Humanity Treaty.

- Call for and take action towards justice and accountability for all human rights violations in Afghanistan.

- Continue to create space to effectively engage with civil society; support ongoing coordination initiatives by Afghan civil society groups inside and outside Afghanistan; recognise and promote Afghan civil society as partners, including them in decision-making processes related to Afghanistan.

- Prioritise women-led civil society organisations and leaders to ensure their voices are represented in all decision-making spaces.

- Prioritise security when engaging with those in Afghanistan.

- Ensure State delegations meeting Taliban de facto authorities always include women, to continue promoting women's rights and equality in public spaces.

- Continue to pressure the Taliban de-facto authorities through all available means to lift all civic space restrictions, with the view of ensuring full respect for the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

- Publicly condemn ongoing violations targeting civil society, including media workers. Call for the de facto authorities to immediately cease the intimidation, harassment, detention, ill-treatment, sexual violence and other reprisals against civil society, and to immediately release all those members of civil society that are currently imprisoned for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms.

To donors:

- Continue to effectively support civil society in Afghanistan and in exile, so they can continue their activities, ensuring that the past human rights gains in Afghanistan are protected and can be built upon.

- Ground all analysis, action, and advocacy in local realities by being informed and working with a diversity of local organisations. Always work through a gender lens and "do-no-harm" approach. Work with trust-based and local ownership models.

- Reduce administrative burdens on local organisations. Ensure that the terms of financial support for civil society take into account ground realities of working under restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities. Consider easing some of the due diligence requirements for organisations that have proved their trustworthiness; generic reporting rules and requirements that are developed for international use are often unworkable in a country like Afghanistan.

- Be more flexible to accommodate the security and administrative needs of local organisations as they navigate the uncertain and unpredictable pathways for registration and project approvals; be cognisant of the fact that some CSOs are forced to work ‘under the radar’ because registration and subsequent approvals procedures can make conducting projects effectively impossible.

- Actively advocate for the reinstatement of women in international and local NGOs, so that resources and humanitarian aid distribution can be guaranteed and can reach women and women-led households.

- Prioritise the safety and security of all local partner organisations that you work with. Ensure your work and requirements do not directly or inadvertently put them at risk.

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the CIVICUS Monitor. However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The panel for this report was convened in January 2026. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as V-Dem, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index, the RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy, and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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