



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Afghanistan

June 2026

Context

Period covered by this report: October 2025 – June 2026

Before the second Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, Afghanistan's civil society was vibrant and active. WHRDs, HRDs, CSOs, CSAs, and journalists were vocal stakeholders in public life, and their work had brought about notable progress in civic rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to protest and freedom of expression were upheld, the head of state was democratically elected, and the 2004 Constitution defined the nation's legal framework. Women were active participants in society as lawyers, politicians, doctors, judges, etc.

However, after the Taliban takeover, the country suffered an immediate and intentional deterioration of its civil and political space. The Taliban, now de facto authorities, carry out indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, torture, harassment, and arbitrary detentions against [civil society](#)^[68]. The Taliban have also marginalised political parties and ethnic groups, persecuted former government officials and prosecutors, and dismantled the legal frameworks and institutions developed in the past two decades to promote and protect human rights. Now, the Taliban's Supreme Leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, rules by decree and has the final say on all key policy decisions, albeit with their interpretation and implementation varying considerably between provinces. Afghanistan's environment for civil society is now completely constrained. Political parties are banned, the media faces extensive restrictions, and absolutely no criticism of the de facto authorities is permitted. The Taliban's General Directorate for Intelligence (GDI) arrests anyone who dares to exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association, or assembly.

The situation for CSAs is further strained by Iran's and Pakistan's deportations of Afghan CSAs and CSAs' family members. Since October 2023, more than two million Afghan refugees and migrants [have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan](#) under the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP). While some of these people have returned 'voluntarily', others have been arrested and deported. CSAs who took refuge in Pakistan after the Taliban takeover claim that the deportations put their lives at serious risk, as the de facto authorities [persecute them for their work](#) once they return to Afghanistan. Between July and December 2025, Iran also deported more than 1,800,000 Afghan migrants. CSAs who have been deported in these waves become extremely vulnerable to being targeted by the Taliban upon return, which, compounded with poverty, threatens their livelihood and the continuation of their work.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Between November 2025 and June 2026, fundamental civic freedoms in Afghanistan remained severely restricted and were further constrained through legal, administrative, and coercive measures. On 4 January 2026, the de facto authorities [implemented](#) the Criminal Procedure Code for Courts, an executive decree governing the judicial regulation for the prosecution of crime. This regulation effectively bypasses the international standards of legality, accountability and equality before the law. The Criminal Procedure Code for Courts fails to ensure fair trial guarantee and omits the right to due process, among others.

The Code introduces an additional layer of systemic repression against civil society and the broader population, further consolidating the authorities' control over the judicial system. Its provisions not only enable the arbitrary targeting of individuals on discriminatory grounds but also create a legal environment in which dissenting voices can be silenced with impunity. This significantly undermines the rule of law and gravely threatens the rights to freedom of

expression, thought, and participation in public life, reinforcing a broader pattern of structural human rights violations.

Freedom of association was further weakened through measures targeting the institutional infrastructure around independent media. In January 2026, the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture revoked the operating licences of most media support and journalist advocacy organisations, reportedly allowing only a small number to continue [operating](#). This restricted not only individual journalists and media workers, but also the professional structures that enable them to organise, access legal and safety support, and defend professional standards.

Freedom of peaceful assembly remained almost entirely closed. Available evidence points mainly to brief, symbolic women-led protests in Kabul around Human Rights Day and International Women's Day. The limited number of documented assemblies should not be interpreted as evidence of tolerance, but rather as a reflection of the high risks attached to public mobilisation, especially for women [activists](#). Physical protest inside the country appears increasingly displaced into private, digital, or exile spaces, while public demonstrations remain rare and exposed to retaliation. This trend was recently [exemplified](#) on 9 June, when the de facto authorities opened fire against 100-150 people who were protesting the arrests of women based on alleged dress-code violations in Herat. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) estimated that during this incident, the Taliban killed at least one person and injured several others with sticks.

Freedom of expression was the most visibly affected dimension during the reporting period. In March 2026, the privately owned Rah-e-Farda TV station was shut down and its assets were seized. In May 2026, media monitors documented a new wave of journalist detentions, including journalists affiliated with TOLONews and Paigard News Agency. After TOLONews reported the detentions, Taliban intelligence officers raided Moby Group's Kabul office, confiscated employees' phones, questioned staff, and placed them under [surveillance](#). These incidents reinforced the chilling effect on independent reporting and demonstrated the continued use of raids, detention, asset seizure, and surveillance to control media activity.

Restrictions on public information also expanded through the enforcement of the ban on publishing images of living beings, referring to images of humans or animals in accordance with the Taliban's morality law framework. By March 2026, media monitors reported that the ban had expanded to 25 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, forcing some television stations to close, convert to radio, or operate without visual [content](#). This further narrowed media pluralism, restricted visual journalism, and reduced public access to independent information. Taken together, these measures deepened self-censorship, weakened civil society support structures, and further limited the ability of civil society actors, journalists, and citizens to organise, document abuses, and participate in public debate.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

Between October 2025 and June 2026, the Taliban continued imposing legal and administrative restrictions on Afghan civil society, severely undermining their operational environment and particularly undermining their protection from interference. Although the Ministry of Economy continued registering foreign and domestic NGOs throughout 2025 (with 72 new NGOs registered in 2025, primarily working in the humanitarian space) many other

civil society organisations (CSOs), including media outlets, had to shut down either temporarily or permanently due to political interference and administrative constraints and pressure.

For example, on 16 October 2025, the de facto authorities through the Taliban General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) temporarily [closed](#) Shamshad TV, which operated in Kabul city, accusing the outlet of inadequate coverage of recent border clashes with Pakistan. On 18 October, the station was allowed to resume broadcasts, albeit subject to a warning. In another example, in December 2025, the Taliban through its Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice [banned](#) media outlets in Herat from broadcasting images of living beings. On 27 December 2025, the de facto authorities banned several community-based learning classes for children up to sixth grade that were funded by humanitarian NGOs, including UNICEF-supported CBE programmes. This ban occurred in Nangarhar, Kunar and Langham provinces. The de facto authorities also confiscated learning materials.

A [report](#) from 4 February 2026 stated that the Taliban have revoked the operating licences of about 1,600 civil society, academic, religious, and cultural organisations, including the Hamid Karzai Foundation, Naser Khosrow Balkhi Foundation led by the family of Sayed Mansour Naderi, several Shia religious institutions, the Women Traders Social Association, Islah Civil Society, and the Afghan Teachers Association. Taken together, these examples underscore a systematic pattern of political interference and regulatory uncertainty under the de facto authorities, leaving CSOs highly vulnerable to arbitrary and unaccountable decision-making.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Afghan CSOs continue operating in a resource-scarce environment, mainly driven by the February 2025 USAID funding freeze, the Taliban's criminalisation of civil society activities and the unreliability of money services providers. The USAID funding freeze – which supported almost 44% of all humanitarian aid in Afghanistan – continues to impact the funding environment in 2026. For example, [Refugees International](#) reported that mortality rates are likely to have risen from 2025 to 2026 due to the halt in women's services during pregnancy. The USAID funding cuts have also led to a decline in protection against gender-based violence and in food security, contributing to the nine million children who are experiencing crisis levels of hunger as of May 2026.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) underscored the systematic lack of resources with its [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026](#). This plan indicates that \$1.43bn is still needed to deliver humanitarian aid for Afghanistan in 2026. The UNAMA mandate – set to expire on 17 June – will likely be renewed but the negotiations around the extension are taking place at a time of extreme international tensions and limited resources. For example, Russia [supports](#) extending the mandate but is calling for unspecified 'conditions' while the US is calling for a [comprehensive review](#) of UNAMA's mandate, focusing on security issues – including counterterrorism – rather than on international assistance. Therefore, the process is likely to result in an even more constrained environment for civil society.

Additionally, the Taliban systematically interfered with the delivery of aid during 2025, at times using corruption or even force to divert aid funds. Media reports from August 2025 [indicate](#) that Taliban officials also leverage their regulatory powers to control aid, including by

determining which humanitarian groups can operate. These practices have likely continued into 2026.

The onset of the Pakistani-Afghan War further deteriorated the funding environment. On 9 October 2025, the Pakistani government undertook airstrikes on Kabul, targeting the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which it accuses of plotting and conducting attacks inside Pakistan. This operation triggered retaliation from the Taliban against the Pakistani army on the border. Clashes continued for several days, until a ceasefire was established. Nevertheless, the ceasefire was effectively dismantled on 21 February 2026, when the de facto Afghan authorities struck a Pakistani military base near their border. According to a [UNAMA report](#) of May 2026, this conflict has resulted in at least 372 civilian deaths and 397 injured. This conflict has also resulted in the [displacement of more than 115,000 people](#), and significant damage to civilian infrastructure, including healthcare facilities and residential areas.

Additionally, the closure of the border has driven a sharp increase in food and medicine prices, further deteriorating food security and health conditions. This context has further strained an already overburdened humanitarian aid system and constrained CSOs' and CSAs' ability to provide services. The UN [reported](#) that the border closure has crippled humanitarian aid delivery.

This situation has been further exacerbated by the war in Iran, which has exposed Afghanistan to disruptions in the supply of food and medicines from one of its primary trading partners. These events create supply chain disruptions, uncertainty and steep inflation that place additional strains on the availability of resources. These events also re-shape donor priorities and conditions, further prioritising humanitarian aid over the protection of human rights in Afghanistan.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Further reinforcing its exclusionary, unaccountable governance framework, the de facto Afghan authorities did not engage in meaningful consultations with civil society during the reporting period. Rather than opening channels for public engagement, legal and administrative operations continued to be carried out through centralised processes with limited public participation, no representative consultation, and few safe avenues to challenge arbitrary [decisions](#).

Transparency remained severely limited, particularly in the legal sphere. According to the [OHCHR](#), the decree on criminal procedure approved by the de facto authorities on January 2026 violated fair trial provisions. Furthermore, [Amnesty International](#) found that the relevant criminal procedure regulations were disseminated in anticipation of implementation even though they have yet to be published in the Official Gazette. Additionally, the official website of the de facto Ministry of Justice now lists all legal documents prior to August 2021 as "annulled" and only those issued by the de facto authorities as "in effect". This reinforced a decree-based legal order in which civil society organisations cannot rely on a predictable or publicly accessible legal framework to understand the rules governing their work.

Participation in decision-making remained absent or tightly controlled. The criminal procedure regulations approved in January 2026 were adopted without prior consultation with civil society actors, legal experts, women's organisations, or other affected communities, excluding these groups from a process that directly shaped the legal environment in which they operate. Moreover, according to [Amu TV](#), in its recent decree issued on 9 February 2026, the de facto

Ministry of Education stated that the funding of educational projects by NGOs would be possible only under “full coordination” with the Ministry. This suggests a shift in which public engagement is controlled in compliance with de facto authority procedures.

Accountability continued to be largely inaccessible. The UN Secretary-General reported that, on 4 January 2026, the Taliban leader instructed officials responsible for enforcing the de facto authorities’ interpretation of Sharia and public morality rules to disregard public [criticism](#), while Amnesty International reported that the Ministry of Justice warned that critique of the new criminal procedure regulation could amount to an objection to Sharia and give rise to criminal [prosecution](#). This made public scrutiny increasingly unsafe for civil society actors.

The de facto authorities also continued to formalise the removal of rights-related structures that had remained only nominally within state institutions since August 2021. Afghanistan International reported in May 2026 that the Directorate of Human Rights and Women’s International Affairs had been removed from the Foreign Ministry [structure](#). While the practical authority of this directorate was limited, its reported removal further signalled the weakening of channels for rights-based engagement. As independent oversight bodies remained absent and de facto legal instruments granted authorities wide room to interpret and enforce rules, civil society actors had limited safe or independent avenues to report abuses, challenge arbitrary decisions, or seek remedies.

Together, these developments further weakened the enabling environment by limiting civil society’s access to information, participation in decision-making, and ability to seek accountability. Exclusion from decision-making, criminalisation of criticism, weakened oversight mechanisms, and inconsistent enforcement collectively reduced the possibility to monitor authorities, influence policy, or defend affected communities through safe and accountable channels.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Public discourse in Afghanistan remained deeply unfavourable to independent civil society, not only because civic action was restricted, but because rights-based advocacy, pluralist debate, and women’s public participation were increasingly framed as incompatible with the de facto authorities’ ideological [order](#). In a November 2025 audio message, the Taliban Supreme Leader rejected the legal and political framework of the former Republic and reiterated that legislation must derive exclusively from the Qur’an and [Hadith](#). This discourse attempts to negate the legitimacy of democratic participation and independent civic organisation by presenting pluralist political and legal traditions as invalid.

The delegitimisation of public participation was reinforced through religious and national-security framings. In January 2026, the de facto Ministry of Justice warned against objecting to the laws of the Islamic Emirate because such actions constitute a rejection of [Sharia](#). Thus, any kind of criticism or challenge to the legislation or policies adopted by the de facto authorities was reframed as religious disobedience. The role of activists and critics was also delegitimised through the framing of such actors as agents of foreign interference and spies, as well as through labelling them as traitors or producers of “toxic [propaganda](#).” This way of portraying civil-society actors further delegitimised their actions since they were perceived as either threats to religious and political order or as disloyal individuals undermining Afghan sovereignty.

Moreover, women's public activity remained highly stigmatised through moral and cultural discourses. A January-March 2026 [UNAMA](#) report stated that a private radio station in Ghazni was shut down because female students communicated with a male presenter, accusing the radio station of conducting activities contrary to cultural and social values. Additionally, several media activists were arrested in December 2025 due to their alleged promotion of women's education. Thus, women's public activity and activism remained highly restricted as it was framed as ethical disorder rather than civic [action](#). The continuous morality-law enforcement campaigns further contributed to the stigma of women's public activity, thus pushing them away from becoming involved in media and public discussion.

UNAMA stated in March 2026 that textbooks on human rights and civic values, as well as political books advocating for democracy, Shia literature, and publications of female authors, were removed from libraries or educational [centres](#). It also became harder for religious actors to preach openly and freely due to a new law on preaching, under which all preaching was supposed to take place according to the teachings of the Hanafi school of law and should not involve female [participants](#).

Overall, civil society's enabling environment was weakened not only through direct repression or exclusion from decision-making, but through a broader public culture in which independent civic engagement was associated with disloyalty, social risk, or moral non-compliance. This further reduced the possibility to mobilise communities and society actors around rights, accountability, and public interest concerns.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Between October 2025 and June 2026, CSOs' and CSAs' access to a secure digital environment remained highly restricted, primarily due to internet shutdowns, social media restrictions, and phone searches. Digital surveillance was also reported. During this period, the de facto authorities were the main perpetrators of breaches of digital privacy; they have now expanded the scope and sophistication of their digital surveillance activities, targeting primarily CSAs. Taliban officials track down activists via their online activity and arrest them, Taliban officials and their supporters use messaging apps to threaten activists and their families privately, and use social media platforms to smear them publicly. In just the first three months of 2026, at least seven people were detained in relation to social media posts¹.

During this period, the Taliban on different occasions also ordered temporary bans on internet access in several provinces, including in Balkh, Baghlan and Kabul. For example, on 1 November 2025, the Taliban [shut down](#) all internet services in Andarab District (Baghlan) without providing any explanation, with citizens suggesting the move was aimed at restricting information flow and in response to fears of anti-Taliban resistance forces operating in the area. On 11 May 2026, a report stated that the Taliban instructed the Afghanistan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ATRA) to [impose new restrictions](#) on fibre-optic Wi-Fi services in Kabul.

In early October, residents of Herat City (Herat province) reported that Taliban officials from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice [were inspecting](#) citizens' mobile phones. Officials reportedly stopped primarily young people at several intersections to examine phone content for alleged violations. Random house searches also continue, during which phones and computers are searched. People have been arrested, for example, for

¹ This information was gathered from an organisational internal database; there are no open sources reports available.

having photos of the old Afghan flag, or for having foreign news websites open. These incidents illustrate the Taliban's systematic efforts to violate digital privacy. Such practices pose significant risks to CSAs, particularly when individuals possess or store evidence of dissent or criticism of the de facto authorities.

Phone searches also occur when CSAs are under arrest and imprisoned. During detention, CSAs are forced to provide phone and laptop passwords, following which the entire contents of their phones and computers are saved by the Taliban and the devices themselves are often seized.

Challenges and Opportunities

The main challenges for Afghanistan's enabling environment are:

1. **The enactment of the Decree No. 12 on the Criminal Rules of Courts:** this decree formalises discrimination before the law, eliminates fundamental guarantees of fair trial and due process, and further restricts freedom of expression and thought. By institutionalising these limitations, the decree significantly increases the risk of arbitrary detention for civil society actors and further erodes their already limited legal protections.
2. **Further restrictions on internet and social media access:** The Taliban will continue to leverage internet and social media access to control the general population. This will continue the deterioration of one of the last avenues through which CSAs could protest, express their views and access information.
3. **Violent repression of peaceful assembly and public dissent:** Public manifestations in Afghanistan are met with intimidation, arbitrary detention, and the excessive use of force, reinforcing fear and discouraging public mobilisation. This pattern was illustrated in June 2026 in Herat, particularly during the 9 June protest crackdown, where protests erupted after the detention of at least 30 women over alleged dress-code violations. Taliban forces responded with beatings and live fire, resulting in at least two casualties, more than 20 injuries, and the detention of over 100 people.
4. **The funding environment:** With major donors making huge cuts and redirecting remaining funds to other geopolitical priorities, there is little prospect of meaningful improvement, at least not for the next two years. This funding uncertainty not only threatens the continuity of existing programmes but also constrains the emergence of new initiatives.
5. **The ongoing deportations of CSAs or CSAs' family members from Iran and Pakistan**
- These governments will continue deporting Afghan refugees, despite this being a clear violation of the principle of non-refoulement. For CSAs, deportation carries a particularly high risk, as they become extremely vulnerable to being targeted by the Taliban upon return, as these individuals often lack the protection, resources, or networks to mitigate the threat.
6. **The normalisation of relations between the Afghan de facto authorities and the international community.** Increasing international engagement with the de facto authorities is likely to embolden the Taliban and encourage further restrictions on CSAs, women, and human rights advocates. This was illustrated when on 23 June, European Commission officials met Taliban representatives in Brussels to discuss the deportations of Afghan nationals. Even if framed as technical engagement, such meetings contribute to the de facto normalisation of the Taliban by granting their representatives international access and visibility, while no meaningful improvements in civic freedoms, women's rights, or accountability have been secured.

7. **Afghanistan's vulnerability to external, geopolitical shocks:** The security and economic environments in Afghanistan have been negatively affected by both the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the war on Iran. Fighting with Pakistan has resulted in dozens of civilian casualties and tens of thousands displaced. In a country already facing a dire humanitarian crisis, the disruption caused by regional conflicts has driven up prices and increased shortages in Afghanistan. Besides the broader effects that these external shocks have on the general population, they continue to reshape donor priorities, media coverage and the security environment under which CSAs and CSOs operate.

That said, some **opportunities** to improve the environment in Afghanistan remain.

1. In October 2025, the UN announced the creation of an [Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan](#) (IIM-A). The IIM-A will be an investigation body tasked with collecting and preserving evidence of war crimes and other violations of international law in Afghanistan committed in the past, present and in the future. The evidence gathered by the IIM-A will later be forwarded to prosecutorial bodies, including the ICC. The IIM-A will provide opportunities to strengthen accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations in the long term. Additionally, CSOs and CSAs involved in documentation and accountability are likely to gain access to a defined institutional channel for evidence submission. This may be accompanied by indirect support, including capacity-building initiatives such as training. The findings by the IIM-A will also likely increase the visibility of the situation in Afghanistan, which is struggling to remain on the international agenda.
2. There is also an ongoing international [campaign to recognise the systematic oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan as gender apartheid](#). Several international NGOs including [Human Rights Watch](#) and the [International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute](#) (IBAHRI) are calling for the recognition of gender apartheid and its codification in international law. If recognised, this would give international accountability mechanisms additional tools with which to pressure the Taliban, as well as making normalisation with the Taliban more costly for international stakeholders. The campaign has also renewed donor engagement and generated valuable knowledge about the situation of women and girls in the country.

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