

## STATEMENT FROM THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY ON THE SEX SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION, AND GENDER APARTHEID IN AFGHANISTAN

[adopted by the General Assembly, on 8 June 2025]

**As delegates of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) General Assembly meeting in Brussels on 7-8 June 2025, we urgently call for bold and uncompromising international action in response to the ongoing and escalating gender apartheid in Afghanistan.**

The lived reality of Afghan women and girls today is one of systemic oppression, violence, exclusion, and invisibility. This is not only a grave humanitarian crisis - it is a blatant and ongoing breach of international human rights law.

As South African human rights lawyer Professor Bonita Meyersfeld explained: *"Gender apartheid is a governing system. Afghan women are not **just facing discrimination**; they are being **legally and politically erased**. They cannot go to school, hold jobs, access health care, or appear in public. This isn't just a cultural or religious practice. It's **a systemic and codified strategy of control**."*

Some key figures<sup>1</sup> show the harsh reality that women and children living in Afghanistan are facing daily. In 2018, **50.8% of Afghan women aged 15-49** had experienced intimate partner violence, with rates reaching **as high as 92%** in some provinces. By 2023, **28.7% of women aged 20-24** had been married before the age of 18, and **9.6%** before the age of 15. In terms of **health and reproductive rights**, only **10% of women** were able to meet their basic health needs in 2022. Afghanistan remains one of the countries with the **highest maternal mortality rates** globally. Each month, an estimated **24,000 women** give birth in remote areas with little or no access to skilled healthcare.

Access to **education** has been severely cut: **80% of school-aged girls** - approximately **2.5 million** - are out of school, including **1.1 million** secondary school-aged girls. In December 2022, more than **100,000 female university students** were banned from continuing their education. The women's labour force participation rate in Afghanistan is among the lowest in the world, at 5.1%, while men's rate is 69.9% and tends to drop. Additionally, vulnerable employment for females is 92.1%<sup>2</sup>, with no data on women's unpaid work. Only 2% of women are business owners, one of the lowest rates in the world. Being fully dependent economically, with no bank accounts or financial resources (only 4.7% of women had bank accounts in 2021), women live in poverty and have no voice in making decisions.

Afghanistan **ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**<sup>3</sup> in 2003 and remains bound by it. The Taliban regime's systematic erasure of women and girls' rights is a flagrant breach of this convention and other legally binding treaties such as the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, ratified in 1994.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Afghanistan Gender Profile 2024 Key Figures.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Vulnerable employment \(% of employment\) \(modeled ILO estimate\) | World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women | OHCHR](#)



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
**LOBBY**  
EUROPÉEN DES FEMMES

The **European Women's Lobby** calls on the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, European Council President António Costa, and EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, **all Member States, the United Nations, and the international community, including private sector actors, to:**

- **Recognise and condemn the gender apartheid in Afghanistan** as a crime under international law.
- **Condition all diplomatic, economic, trade, and investment agreements** on the full reinstatement of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan.
- **Hold the Taliban regime accountable** for violations of CEDAW and other international human rights instruments.
- **Fund and support Afghan women's organisations** both within the country and in exile.
- **Guarantee safe pathways and asylum mechanisms** for women human rights defenders and those at risk.

We stand in unwavering solidarity with the women and girls of Afghanistan. We refuse to accept a world where half the population is invisible and systematically oppressed.

**We will not remain silent in the face of gender apartheid.**



Funded by  
the European Union