

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR AFGHAN WOMEN IN CENTRAL ASIA

A Pathway to Economic
Empowerment for Inclusive
Regional Stability



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The OSCE Gender Issues Programme works towards the implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and relevant Ministerial Council decisions. It supports systematic efforts to mainstream gender equality across the Organization in all its policies, programmes, projects, and activities in the three dimensions of comprehensive security, namely politico-military, economic and environmental, and human.

Under its multi-year, comprehensive project “**WIN - Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality**”, the Gender Issues Programme is striving to advance gender equality as a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies in the OSCE area, in line with the 2004 Action Plan and other OSCE commitments. The information, views, opinions and conclusions presented in this document are not provided by nor necessarily endorsed by the OSCE, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

FOREWORD BY DR LARA SCARPITTA, *OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues*



In today's complex global landscape, the role of women in building and maintaining peace has never been more critical. Nowhere is this more evident than in Afghanistan, where the systematic

suppression of women's rights threatens not just individual lives and societal structures, but also risks creating regional spill over effects.

The OSCE participating States share a deep commitment to Afghan women—supporting their fight for freedom and human rights, providing safe spaces for their voices to be heard, and ensuring their rightful place in all decision-making processes regarding Afghanistan's future. This commitment extends beyond women living in Afghanistan to those who were forced to flee their homes and are now rebuilding their lives in exile. They also need targeted support and investment.

Over the past months, the Gender Issues Programme, with support from the WIN—Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality project, conducted a needs assessment to identify potential areas where the OSCE could support Afghan women living in Central Asia. The study examined how Afghan women living in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan can access and use digital technologies for economic empowerment, identifying barriers, gaps, and opportunities. The resulting report presents evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, focusing on digital transformation and women's empowerment in conflict settings.

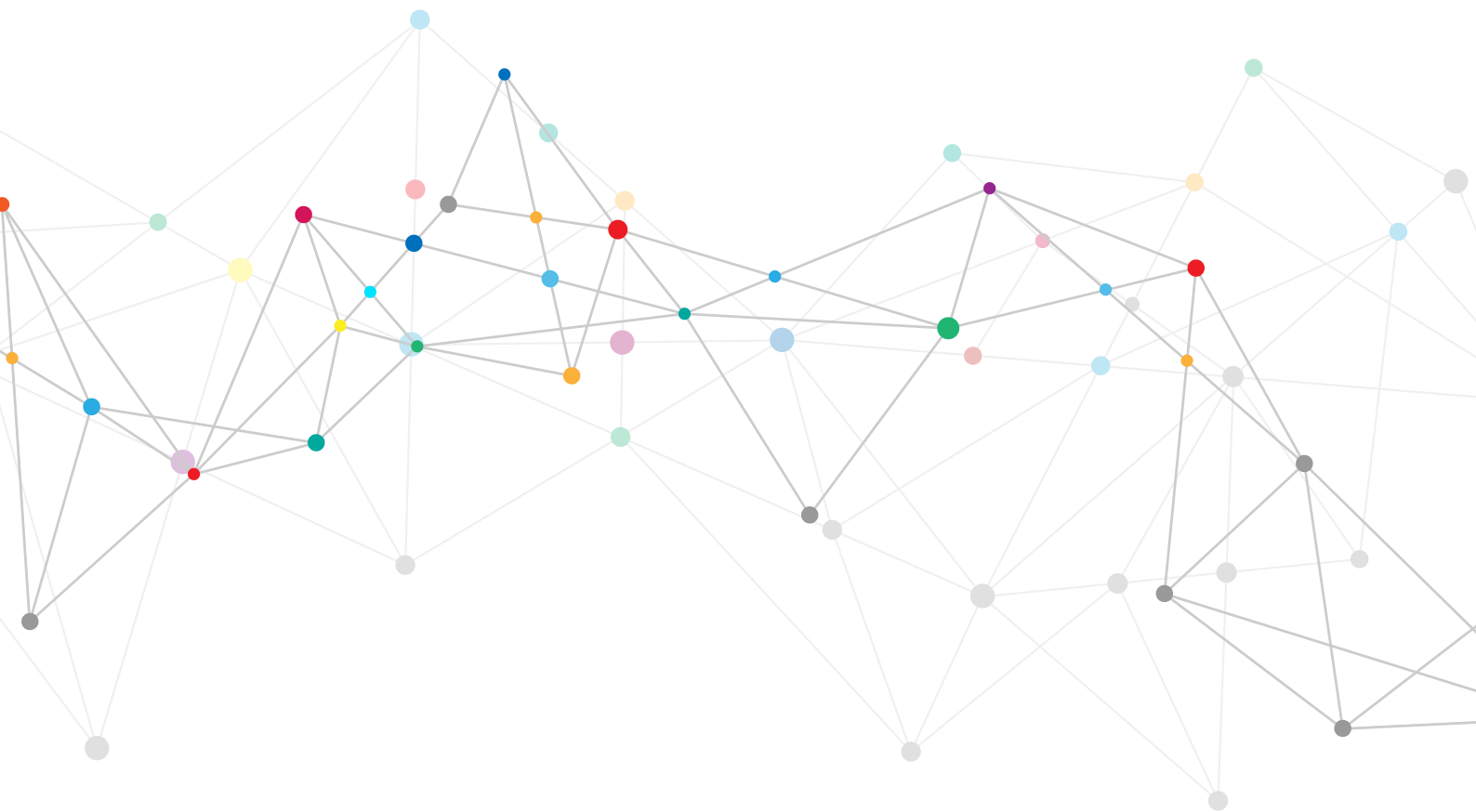
The OSCE remains steadfast in supporting Afghan women through concrete actions and initiatives. Together with our partners, we will continue to advocate for their rights, amplify their voices, and work toward a future where Afghan women can fully participate in shaping their country's destiny. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to ensuring Afghan women's meaningful participation in shaping their nation's future, while contributing to the OSCE's broader mission of promoting peace and comprehensive security.

Dr. Lara Scarpitta

SUMMARY

Digital literacy and access to technology have become crucial factors in promoting women's social and economic inclusion, in particular for those affected by conflict. In response to the continued erosion of women's rights following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the Gender Issues Programme conducted a comprehensive needs assessment focused on digital engagement opportunities for Afghan women living in Central Asia. Using qualitative research methods and innovative

storytelling techniques, the assessment examined the complex landscape of digital access, identifying key barriers, gaps and opportunities for meaningful engagement. Based on these findings, this paper presents evidence-based policy recommendations to address the unique challenges and aspirations of Afghan women in Central Asia, offering practical solutions to enhance their digital inclusion and socio-economic participation.



INTRODUCTION

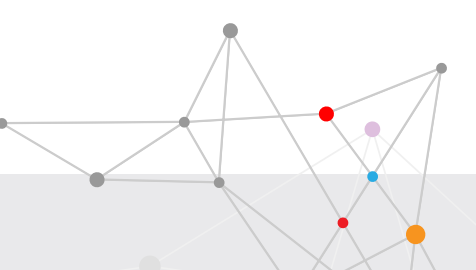
As the world's largest regional security organization, the OSCE plays a vital role in promoting the human rights and security of women, men, boys and girls. The Gender Issues Programme (GIP), under the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, oversees the implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (hereinafter the Action Plan) and related Ministerial Council (MC) decisions. Through its comprehensive approach, it mainstreams gender equality across OSCE institutions and field operations, encompassing the Organization's politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions of security.

Building on the commitments made under the Action Plan, in 2019 the OSCE launched its multi-year, comprehensive project, WIN—Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality. This initiative seeks to advance gender equality as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving and maintaining stable, prosperous and peaceful societies within the OSCE area. It aligns closely with the Action Plan and other MC commitments, reaffirming the Organization's dedication to promote gender equality as an essential part of comprehensive security and co-operation frameworks.

The ongoing security, economic, environmental, human rights and humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan remain a pressing concern for the OSCE region, particularly for neighbouring Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The security and development of Central Asia and the broader OSCE area is deeply linked with Afghanistan's stability. For

instance, the potential for increased transnational threats, such as terrorism and trafficking in drugs and in human beings, is a primary concern. The Taliban takeover in 2021 has heightened fears of Afghanistan becoming a haven for extremist groups that could destabilize the broader region. Economically, Afghanistan serves as a crucial conduit for facilitating trade between Central and South Asia. Still, persistent insecurity hinders trade routes and infrastructure projects (i.e., the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India pipeline).

The Taliban's takeover has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, marked by systematic human rights violations that have profoundly disrupted all facets of society. Widespread abuses—including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, targeted attacks on minorities and forced displacement—persist throughout the country. Women and girls have been particularly affected, facing severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, access to employment, healthcare and education. Their participation in public and political life has been virtually eliminated through a series of gender-discriminatory policies. Since August 2021, these harsh conditions have forced Afghans to flee to neighbouring Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (all OSCE participating States), as well as Iran and Pakistan. Afghan women in particular face significant challenges in these countries, especially in obtaining access to education and work.



Recognizing these challenges, the OSCE launched the Framework for Response to the Implications of Afghanistan for the OSCE Region (RIOAR), which currently includes 38 projects implemented in Central Asia. This framework offers participating States a comprehensive platform to manage regional impacts through three key objectives:



MITIGATING RISKS:

- Disrupt illicit flows, organized crime and terrorism originating from Afghanistan.
- Strengthen border management and co-operation among OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to enhance security.



ADDRESSING VULNERABILITIES:

- Support communities in vulnerable situations, particularly women and youth, who face increased risks of violence, trafficking and economic hardship.
- Promote inclusive and resilient societies through targeted assistance programmes.



PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES:

- Facilitate economic and energy development to adapt to regional changes caused by the situation in Afghanistan.
- Support initiatives that promote connectivity, trade and development in the region.

In response to the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and participating States met in June 2022 to address Afghan women's rights and the impact of their post-takeover situation on regional and global stability. The meeting explored concrete strategies to empower Afghan women, highlighting how international support for gender equality contributes to sustainable development and peace.

That same year, a group of Afghan women leaders living in the OSCE region were invited by GIP/WIN to join the Women Peace Leadership Programme and the Young Women for Peace Initiative, empowering them through capacity-building activities to strengthen their leadership for peacebuilding

but also providing them avenues to amplify their messages and engage with decision-makers. In addition, prominent Afghan women joined the meetings of the OSCE Networking Platform for Women Leaders, including Peacebuilders and Mediators.



"My Voice, Our Peace! Connecting Women Peace Leaders from Afghanistan and Ukraine", Geneva Peace Week 2023



Further advancing its commitment, including under the Generation Equality initiative, the GIP organized in partnership with Finland a conference on the digital empowerment of women in conflict settings in March 2023, during the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which included the participation of the former Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Fawzia Koofi. The event underscored the transformative potential of digitalization in creating economic opportunities for women from conflict-affected regions. It showcased how technology can facilitate income generation, access to services, education and information, and assist in obtaining identification documents.

The OSCE's focus on Afghanistan continued during the Asian Partners for Co-operation Group meeting in May 2023, where participants examined the deteriorating human rights situation of Afghan women and girls. Former OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid reaffirmed the

Organization's commitment to addressing the regional repercussions of Afghanistan's crisis. She also expressed solidarity with "the courageous and inspiring women and girls who continue their resilient resistance and struggle for their dignity".

This paper presents the results of a needs assessment conducted by the GIP in 2024, which was aimed at developing digital activities for Afghan women living in the OSCE participating States Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The assessment examined barriers, gaps and opportunities for these women to access and use digital technologies for education and employment, using a qualitative research approach as well as innovative storytelling tools. The publication also includes recommendations for policymakers to help promote Afghan women's self-determination and empowerment through policy interventions that are evidence-based, contextually relevant and responsive to the specific challenges and aspirations of these women.



DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT SETTINGS: WHY IT MATTERS

“

Afghanistan is now a transformed country, women and youth connected to digital platforms are part of that transformation. Being in exile, I start my day by connecting with girls from remote parts of Afghanistan. Their hopes for a better future are shattered, but they don't give up. We need to connect them to get access to education using digital technology.” -

FAWZIA KOOFI,
Afghan Politician and Women's Rights Advocate
@Fawziakoofi77

“Digital Empowerment of Women in Conflict Settings: Why it Matters”, New York, CSW67



EMPOWERING WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

THE GLOBAL SITUATION



The digital era presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for women and girls, globally. As digital technologies transform societies and economies, they hold immense potential to accelerate progress toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. However, obstacles continue to hinder equal participation and access, requiring targeted efforts to address these challenges effectively.

The transformative power that digital technologies offer to improve the lives of millions of underserved girls and women worldwide is generating complex hurdles that reinforce and intensify existing gender inequalities, discrimination and violence (UN WOMEN, 2024). One such issue is the widening gender digital divide, which has become a significant barrier to gender equality. Another serious concern is that although human capital is essential for integrating digital technologies into production processes, significant gender disparity persists, with men predominantly occupying roles as ICT specialists—a gap observed across various countries (OECD, 2023).

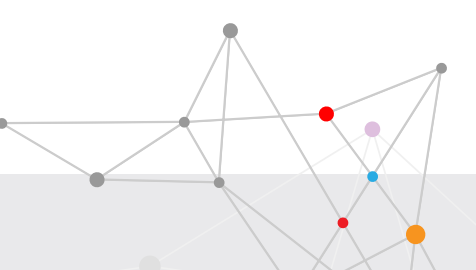
Women and girls face multiple barriers in accessing educational opportunities in the digital economy, limiting their career prospects. These include: financial constraints that lead families to prioritize boys' digital education over girls'; restrictive gender norms that limit girls' participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

and digital fields; online harassment, cyberbullying and unsafe online spaces that deter digital engagement; and mobility restrictions that prevent access to digital training centres and technology. Addressing the digital gender gap requires more than improving connectivity—it demands equipping women and girls with essential skills and knowledge while ensuring safe environments for their digital engagement.

To this end, in 2023, the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women proposed bold recommendations to harness digital transformation's rapid pace and reach for women's empowerment. It called for leveraging financing to promote inclusive digital transformation and innovation, fostering gender-responsive education in digital, science and technology, and enhancing data science to empower all women and girls. It also focused on marginalized groups, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities and migrant women. The digital empowerment of migrant women, particularly those impacted by conflict, underscores how digital tools enhance access to vital income-generating opportunities in precarious situations (OSCE, 2023).



Heela Yoon, WPLP Alumni, 2nd Edition



WOMEN IN CRISIS SITUATIONS



Women in conflict zones or those displaced by war face significant and specific challenges, including heightened risks of violence, lack of infrastructure and limited access to services. Women's vulnerability and well-being are further compromised by being exposed to sexual violence, loss of livelihood, restricted access to healthcare and essential services, displacement, and economic instability—all of which further entrenches gender inequality. In such crises, women and girls also face distinct digital challenges and setbacks, including limited access to devices and reliable internet connectivity; inadequate digital literacy training; insufficient local digital infrastructure; and high risks of online harassment, surveillance and exploitation. Digital tools provide a crucial role in providing immediate assistance during humanitarian crises; therefore, expanding digital access in conflict-affected areas is vital for women to receive humanitarian aid, access healthcare and maintain family connections. Beyond humanitarian assistance, digital tools are also essential for post-conflict recovery, support of rebuilding efforts, economic development and the fostering of social cohesion.



Fatema Hosseini, YW4P Participant

In conflict and post-conflict situations, women face disproportionate exposure to gender-based violence (GBV)—including online GBV—harassment, sexual extortion, trafficking networks, misinformation, disinformation and digital surveillance. While technology can enhance programmes addressing GBV, promote access to education and employment, and combat discrimination and harmful practices, it also presents significant risks. Once data is collected—whether digitally or face-to-face—ensuring its complete security becomes challenging, particularly with sensitive information. Educating women and girls about technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and digital safety practices enables them to better navigate these circumstances (UNFPA, 2023). Enhanced digital literacy equips women to protect their privacy online, avoid unsafe digital spaces, and report abuses effectively. Digital security training is essential to protect them from potential exploitation. While pursuing safe and ethical technology use and establishing a global framework for consistent standards to counter TFGBV remains crucial, digital spaces also offer opportunities for women to rebuild their lives. Well-designed technology solutions that respect and support women's rights can facilitate their participation in education, employment and peacebuilding efforts throughout conflict and post-conflict scenarios.



Elham Kohistani, WPLP Alumni, 1st Edition



THE STRUGGLE OF AFGHAN WOMEN

CONTEXT

Afghan women's lives have been profoundly impacted by decades of conflict, with their freedoms curtailed under both Taliban regimes. This has created an urgent need to enhance their participation and decision-making in education, employment, and peacebuilding efforts.

Under the government known as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (in power since January 2004 until the Taliban takeover in August 2021), significant progress was made in women's emancipation and self-determination through expanded employment opportunities, education access, and efforts to combat forced marriages and domestic violence. These advancements brought women closer to achieving equal status in society. However, since the Taliban takeover, these achievements have been systematically reversed, with the Taliban imposing more than 120 bans and orders restricting women's rights, as well as re-introducing such punishments as public stoning and flogging (USIP, 2024). These restrictions encompass a ban on girls' education after age 12, severe constraints on women's employment, and significant barriers to their public participation, effectively erasing decades of progress in gender equality.



Photo credits: NOVE Caring Humans

Most recently, the Taliban imposed the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, comprising 35 articles that outline strict regulations on personal conduct, primarily targeting women. This legislation, officially published on 31 July 2024, marks a further escalation of the already severe restrictions imposed on women.



The Special Envoys and Representatives for Afghanistan expressed grave concern over the Taliban's decision in December 2024 to ban women and girls from attending public and private medical training institutions and expressed concern that this new ban will have devastating consequences for all Afghans, especially mothers and infants – both born and unborn, boys and girls – and will further destabilize an already fragile healthcare system.”

Special Envoys and Representatives for Afghanistan, of Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Geneva, 16 December 2024



MASS MIGRATION TO AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBOURS

Afghanistan's ongoing economic and social instability affects the wider Central Asian region, as well as Europe. In the wake of the civilian evacuation in August 2021, many Afghans, particularly women, sought refuge in neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, as well as Central Asian countries. This surge in emigration has placed millions in precarious situations.

Afghan refugees face many obstacles, including language barriers in education systems, lack of legal status needed for school enrolment, and bureaucratic restrictions, such as prohibitions on

residing in major cities, which limit their employment opportunities. In response to these social, economic and administrative challenges, various initiatives have emerged to support in particular Afghan women refugees in Central Asia. Local and international organizations provide education and vocational training to help women and girls continue their education or develop skills for online work. These efforts are vital for empowering Afghan women to overcome the restrictions they face in their host countries, and help protect and promote the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan itself.

IDENTIFYING AFGHAN WOMEN'S DIGITAL NEEDS

In line with its multi-dimensional commitment to enhancing security in Central Asia, the OSCE completed a needs assessment in December 2024 to guide the development of digitalization activities for Afghan women living as refugees in its participating States Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The assessment examined barriers, gaps and opportunities for accessing and leveraging digital technologies for economic empowerment, providing them with a chance to rebuild their lives and overcome barriers to education and employment.

The assessment adopted a qualitative research approach to comprehensively understand Afghan women's needs. The methodology was designed to capture diverse perspectives and provide actionable insights. It integrated three primary components: a desk review, key informant interviews, and thematic analysis. This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns, unique insights and critical gaps. Themes such as digital literacy, access to infrastructure, socio-cultural barriers and economic opportunities were systematically explored to

inform the recommendations. A mapping of ongoing initiatives, programmes and resources aimed at assisting Afghan women via digital tools was conducted. The review encompassed local, regional and global efforts while exploring the broader geopolitical and cultural landscape to pinpoint gaps and opportunities that digitalization could address.

The assessment included in-depth interviews with five key stakeholder groups: Afghan women refugees, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector leaders, members of the Afghan diaspora, and representatives from educational and multilateral organizations.



Shahnaz Haidary, YW4P Participant



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The assessment's findings underscore the transformative potential of inclusive digital transformation to empower Afghan women. Addressing such barriers as digital safety, skill gaps, economic dependency, and cultural constraints through regional partnerships and scalable initiatives, is critical for promoting human rights, women's empowerment and stability in Central Asia.



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INSIGHTS FROM PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVES

Interviews with private sector representatives, particularly from the Afghan diaspora, highlight critical insights into ongoing digital initiatives:

- ✔ **SECURE PLATFORMS:** Safe online platforms are essential to access skills training and remote work, although digital safety concerns persist, such as online harassment and abuse, fear of being under digital surveillance from authorities or individuals in their community, and concern about the security of personal data (such as contact details) and other identifying information.
- ✔ **COLLABORATION NETWORKS:** Partnerships with diaspora-led organizations strengthen employment pathways and address cultural and infrastructural challenges.
- ✔ **CONTEXT-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS:** Many programmes need better adaptation to varying digital literacy and connectivity levels, particularly for women refugees.
- ✔ **PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS:** Private sector programmes effectively link training with job opportunities, outperforming traditional NGO approaches.
- ✔ **SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES:** Long-term success depends on secure platforms and regional partnerships to foster economic empowerment and resilience.



Photo credits: NOVE Caring Humans



INSIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL NGOS

Discussions with NGOs identify key barriers and needs specific to Afghan women refugees:

- ✔ **INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICITS:** Limited access to devices, secure internet and reliable connectivity hinders participation in digital programmes.
- ✔ **SECURITY CONCERNS:** Fear of surveillance (including from male family members) restricts online engagement, underscoring the need for stronger security protocols.
- ✔ **SKILL GAPS IN DIGITAL LITERACY:** Insufficient digital literacy prevents women from competing in global markets, highlighting the need for tailored training.



Zakia-Alizada, YW4P Participant

CHALLENGES IN JOB PLACEMENT: Many programmes struggle to bridge skill development with employment. Afghan women need sustainable job pathways that consider their unique needs, including mobility limitations and regional security concerns.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND DEPENDENCY: Without integrated training and employment pathways, women rely on informal, unstable jobs, limiting their long-term economic independence.



Our people have endured profound suffering, with trauma passed down from mothers to daughters across generations. Now, living outside Afghanistan, I can finally breathe. Freedom from oppression has granted me the opportunity to focus on my education. I learned to code and secured a remote position with a private company through a digital training program. This enables me to support my family back home financially."

23-year-old Afghan refugee living in Kyrgyzstan



Photo credits: NOVE Caring Humans

TESTIMONIALS FROM AFGHAN WOMEN LIVING IN CENTRAL ASIAN PARTICIPATING STATES

Interviews with Afghan women reveal significant structural and socio-economic barriers:

✔ **CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS:** Socio-cultural norms, limited resources, and ethnic biases significantly restrict women's digital engagement and economic empowerment. These challenges further hinder Afghan refugees' access to resources in Central Asia.

✔ **RESOURCE ACCESS CHALLENGES:** Limited funding and workspace challenges restrict growth and productivity. Complex visa regulation hinders regional trade and online market access, while inadequate digital infrastructure compounds these issues. Many self-employed Afghan women and small producers often lack safe workspaces essential for productivity, efficiency, community support and mental well-being—all crucial factors for managing displacement.

✔ **DIVERSE NEEDS:** The Afghan refugee population in Central Asia represents diverse socio-economic backgrounds, education levels and access to resources. While some demonstrate advanced digital literacy, others face basic literacy challenges, creating complexities in training delivery and resulting in disparate employment outcomes.

✔ **TRAUMA IMPACT:** Cultural and psychological trauma significantly affects women's participation in educational and economic initiatives. Interviews reveal that international organizations often neglect these issues, reducing programme effectiveness.

LABOUR MARKET DISCONNECT: Current training programmes often misalign with actual job market demands, limiting long-term economic prospects and slowing integration efforts.



Farima Nawabi, WPLP Alumni, 2nd Edition



Maryam Ranjbar, WPLP Alumni, 1st Edition

TESTIMONIALS FROM CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN SUPPORTING AFGHANS

Central Asian women working in the technology sector and international organizations supporting Afghan refugees identify key opportunities:

- ✓ **CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS:** Strategic regional partnerships deliver resources, strategies and connections to boost Afghan women's empowerment.
- ✓ **REGIONAL LINKAGES:** Building connections between Afghan and Central Asian women through education and employment strengthens networks and enables practical co-operation.
- ✓ **ACCESS TO DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND LEGAL SUPPORT:** Accessible digital platforms and tailored legal frameworks empower Afghan women to participate effectively in education, employment and broader economic activities within the region.
- ✓ **COMMUNITY-BASED RESOURCES:** Robust local support systems build resilience, fostering empowerment and sustainable economic independence.



Life here is relatively safe, but I face significant challenges as an Afghan woman seeking professional growth. Many of us have started working in tailoring, beauty salons, or small-scale production, but our potential for economic independence is limited without structured support. I decided to join a basic computer training course and continued educating myself in using digital tools. Now, I help other Afghan women set up their companies online and use social media to sell their products abroad. My clients and I strive to overcome obstacles, sharing resources and knowledge to build sustainable livelihoods together."

27-year-old Afghan refugee living in Central Asia

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES' CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions from international bilateral and multilateral organizations highlight structural approaches to empowerment:

- ✓ **INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMMES:** Regional initiatives tackle education, vocational training and digital literacy gaps.
- ✓ **ACCESS BARRIERS:** Legal documentation requirements, inadequate infrastructure and cultural constraints limit Afghan women's participation, particularly in rural areas of Central Asia countries.
- ✓ **MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES:** Online education programmes must address isolation and mental health concerns (i.e., post-traumatic stress disorder).
- ✓ **COLLABORATIVE POTENTIAL:** Strategic and financial partnerships among international organizations need strengthening to enhance digital programmes through scholarships, technology and online platforms.

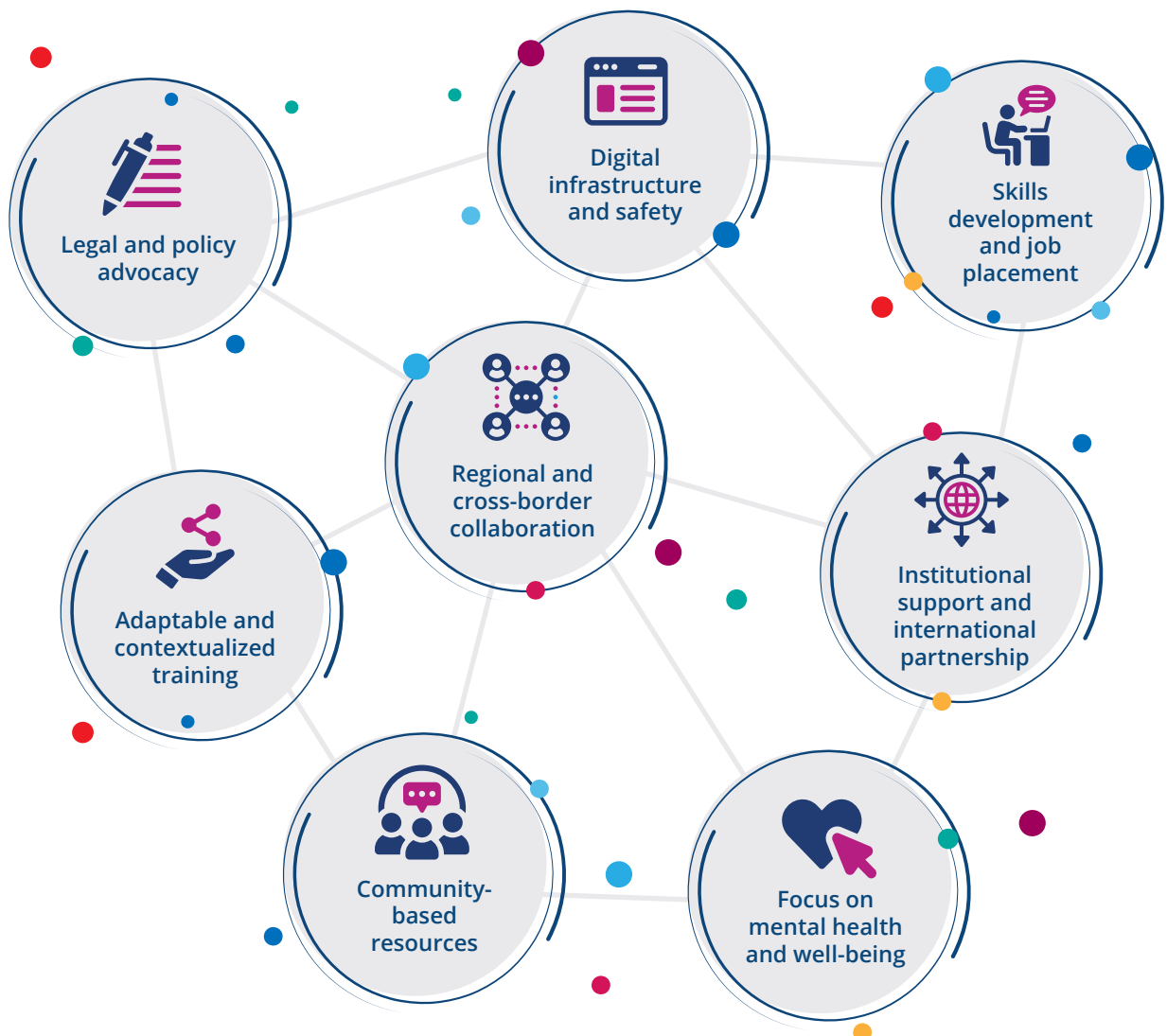
THE WAY FORWARD

The OSCE GIP/WIN Needs Assessment highlights the urgent need for multi-faceted, culturally sensitive, intersectional and scalable interventions to empower Afghan women refugees in Central Asia.

Key insights confirm that digital technologies hold transformative potential to bridge gender disparities. However, this transformation requires addressing systemic barriers, including limited

infrastructure, skill gaps and restrictive socio-political environments. Regional collaborations have proven crucial, showing how cross-border support networks enhance education and employment opportunities for Afghan women. Current challenges, including legal restrictions, insufficient rural outreach and a lack of refugee-specific solutions, underscore the need for targeted interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The OSCE GIP/WIN Needs Assessment highlights the urgent need for multi-faceted, culturally sensitive, intersectional and scalable interventions to empower Afghan women refugees in Central Asia.

- ✓ **LEGAL AND POLICY ADVOCACY:** Examine/review visa and work permit restrictions to enhance Afghan women's economic opportunities. Eliminate legal barriers and foster regulatory co-operation to support women's participation in local and regional economies.
- ✓ **DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SAFETY:** Prioritize devices, internet access and secure digital platforms for low-resource environments. Promote and implement robust data protection measures, addressing Afghan women's fears of surveillance and retaliation, especially in refugee settings.
- ✓ **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND JOB PLACEMENT:** Address skills gaps by designing programmes for basic and advanced digital skills, bridging gaps that hinder Afghan women's competitiveness in the regional economy. Integrate employment pathways to develop initiatives that directly link training to digital job placements, focusing on remote and flexible roles tailored to Afghan women's mobility and security constraints.
- ✓ **ADAPTABLE AND CONTEXTUALIZED TRAINING:** Develop programmes that respect Afghan women's diverse educational and cultural backgrounds, avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches. Implement trauma-informed practices and inclusive learning methods.
- ✓ **REGIONAL AND CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION:** Strengthen partnerships between Afghan and Central Asian women to build robust support networks. Establish regional digital marketplaces to facilitate cross-border trade participation.
- ✓ **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP:** Scale successful programmes and develop international partnerships to expand scholarship opportunities and online learning access.
- ✓ **COMMUNITY-BASED RESOURCES:** Strengthen community initiatives supporting Afghan women's sustainable livelihoods through local networks, social movements and NGOs. Prioritize rural connectivity and programme inclusivity.
- ✓ **FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:** Integrate mental health resources in online education, particularly for women facing isolation due to restrictive norms imposed upon them. Include psychological support and local language courses in educational initiatives for economic empowerment.



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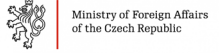
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