

ICCT Message to the Humanitarian Country Team
Analysis of the Impact of the Ban on Operational Responses

The recent order barring Afghan women humanitarian workers of national and international organisations from going to work will have a devastating humanitarian impact on millions of people across the country, as it will prevent vulnerable women and girls from receiving services and lifesaving assistance as well as impacting the quality of said services and assistance. The order violates the most fundamental rights of women, restricts their participation in the workforce, curtails women's freedom, and is in clear breach of humanitarian principles.

While the situation for women staff remains uncertain, there are some national and international NGOs that have taken the difficult decision to temporarily suspend non-lifesaving activities in Afghanistan. The de facto authorities have vowed that women aid workers providing lifesaving healthcare, nutrition services and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) can continue to work. However, the ICCT is of the view that **all activities under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)** should be considered lifesaving. In addition to health, nutrition and MHPSS services, this also includes reaching vulnerable households with food and livelihoods support; reaching people with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance; ensuring that children have access to education and education materials; providing vulnerable households with emergency shelter and household items; and reaching women, girls, men and boys with protection assistance.

Without women driving the humanitarian response, partners would not have jointly reached more than 25 million people in need with lifesaving assistance since the start of the year.

Impact of full ban on female workers

If the order of the de facto authorities banning women from working remains in place and humanitarian partners do not suspend their activities, lifesaving assistance will be discontinued for up to half of the people targeted for assistance in 2023, affecting **more than 11.6 million women and girls**.

The ban on female workers affects Clusters' ability to provide key services and distributions, as well as severely impacting the quality of the assistance. This means that women and girls will not be targeted directly in distributions; that their vulnerabilities will not be assessed nor their preference on how to be assisted considered (e.g., related to design of shelter solutions, siting of WASH infrastructure such as water points and latrines, as well as projects and programmes which should be sensitive to the restrictions of women and culture norms). Women-headed households, which comprise at least 10 per cent of overall households in Afghanistan based on multiple data sources, will not be directly assisted nor consulted. This will also impact other vulnerable groups such as widows and women with disabilities.

Additionally, in the immediate term, the ban will result in late delivery of winter assistance to almost 1 million people in need of lifesaving seasonal winter items (such as warm clothing, heating materials and blankets in winter), leaving many vulnerable households exposed to the harsh winter conditions and at risk of respiratory infections, hypothermia, and preventable mortality especially among children and the elderly. Additionally, food assistance (in-kind and cash), cash for protection, counselling and legal assistance on HLP rights, victim assistance to survivors of explosive ordnance, and distribution of WASH NFIs will have to scale down (however, the extent to which activities will scale-down is yet to be quantified). For some sectors, particularly GBV, the ban on women aid workers will lead to a complete suspension of operations across the country.

In October alone, food and livelihoods support was delivered to 6.6 million women and children; 429,000 children and pregnant and lactating women were supported to prevent and address - including through information - acute malnutrition; 420,000 women and children were reached with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance; 553,000 children were supported with access to education and education materials; 832,000 women and girls were reached with health services; 63,000 women and children were reached with emergency shelter and household items; and 809,000 women and children were supported with protection assistance. If the immediate ban on female aid workers

and field monitors remains in place, the level of assistance as well as the quality being provided to these women and children will be severely curtailed.

Human costs of suspending full operations

If the ban on Afghan women remains in place and humanitarian partners decide to suspend all operations, lifesaving assistance will be discontinued for **23.7 million people** prioritised to receive multi-sector assistance in 2023.

The human cost of a potential suspension of all operations will have the following impact on some core activities:

- 6 million people in IPC 4 may slip into IPC phase 5 (famine) and 13.8 million people in IPC 3 may slip into IPC phase 4 (emergency).
- More than 1,000 primary care facilities, able to serve more than 15 million people, will close. 3 million children under five years of age and 3.3 million women of reproductive age will have limited access to child and reproductive health services.
- 13.5 million people will miss out on safe water supply which could result in displacement as well as water-borne and water-based diseases, including acute watery diarrhoea (AWD)/cholera, typhoid and dysentery.
- 600,000 children will miss out on education services.
- Over 1.3 million people (newly displaced and other affected vulnerable households) will have no access to emergency shelter and core relief household items.
- Over 3 million children and pregnant and lactating women across will miss out on lifesaving nutrition services delivered through static and mobile sites, as well as community-based nutrition services.
- 14.1 million people will miss out on key general protection services; 2 million women and girls will not be reached with GBV services; 108,500 people living with insecure land rights in informal settlements will not be targeted with interventions to improve tenure security; 730,204 boys and girls will be left without mental health and psychosocial support intervention to help improve their wellbeing; and some 1.3 million people will be deprived from receiving explosive ordnance risk education including 456,301 women and girls.