

POLICY BRIEF

Systematic Killings and Escalating Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Afghanistan Under Taliban Rule (Post-2021): Accountability Gaps and International Response Options

Date: 20 May (Virtual Expert Dialogue – Space X)

Conveners: Dialogue Hub for Common Ground, Women Justice Movement, Women's Motion Network, EVE

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THE RISE OF MYSTERIOUS KILLINGS OF WOMEN UNDER TALIBAN RULE

In this live panel discussion, we will explore and discuss the alarming increase in the mysterious killings of women, the state of women's safety and rights under the Taliban administration, and its human and social consequences.

DATE: MAY 20 TIME: 6:00 PM CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME (CET)



Jamshid Rasuli

Former spokesperson of the attorney general office of Afghanistan



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Lawyer and human rights activist



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Moderator

YOUR PRESENCE AND INSIGHTS WILL GREATLY ENRICH THIS DISCUSSION. WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Host: DIALOGUE HUB | Women's Motion Network | Voice for Women's Rights | Women's Justice Movement



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1. Executive Summary

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has experienced a systematic and sustained deterioration of women's rights, accompanied by escalating patterns of gender-based violence, enforced exclusion from public life, and the near-total collapse of accountability mechanisms.

In addition to widespread restrictions on education, mobility, and employment, multiple Afghan and international media outlets and human rights documentation platforms have reported a concerning pattern of violent attacks against women, including cases of targeted and suspicious killings in both public and private spaces. Reports by Afghan media such as Rukhshana Media, Amu TV, and other independent documentation initiatives, alongside statements from human rights defenders, have documented incidents involving young women found killed under unclear or contested circumstances in recent years. These cases remain largely uninvestigated or unprosecuted, reinforcing concerns over systemic impunity.

Evidence discussed in expert dialogues indicates that violence against women in Afghanistan is increasingly characterized by a structural pattern of protection failure, where legal safeguards have been weakened or rendered inaccessible, and survivors face extreme barriers to justice, protection, and remedy.

The absence of functioning, independent accountability institutions has created a context of near-total impunity, in which both documented and underreported cases of violence persist without effective investigation or judicial response.

This policy brief synthesizes key findings from expert discussions and proposes actionable recommendations for the European Union, United Nations system, and international stakeholders, with a focus on accountability, evidence preservation, and sustained support for Afghan women-led documentation and protection networks.

Recent reporting by Afghanistan International has also highlighted an alleged case involving the violent killing of two teenage girls in May 2026. According to the outlet's coverage, the incident is reportedly linked to a former employee of the Afghan republican government who later pledged allegiance to the Taliban. These allegations, as reported by the media outlet, remain unverified by independent judicial investigation; however, they contribute to ongoing concerns regarding the persistence of extreme violence against women and the continued absence of transparent and functioning accountability mechanisms.

2. Context and Problem Statement

Following the political changes in 2021, Afghanistan's institutional framework for women's protection has been significantly weakened, including:

- Suspension or dismantling of specialized gender justice mechanisms
- Severe restrictions on women's mobility, education, employment, and public life
- Collapse of accessible judicial and protective services for survivors of violence
- Shrinking civic space for documentation and advocacy

Within this context, reported cases of **serious gender-based violence, including killings of women**, have raised urgent concerns regarding **systemic protection failure and lack of accountability**.

3. Key Findings from the Dialogue

3.1 Systemic Nature of Violence

Participants emphasized that violence against women must be understood as part of a **broader structural pattern**, not isolated criminal acts.

3.2 Impunity and Lack of Rule of Law

- No effective independent justice mechanisms for women exist in practice
- Lack of investigation, prosecution, and enforcement creates structural impunity
- Deterrence mechanisms are absent or non-functional

3.3 Collapse of Protection Infrastructure

- Prior women protection systems (courts, prosecution units, shelters) are no longer operational in their previous form
- Survivors face extreme barriers to reporting and safety

3.4 Underreporting and Information Gaps

- Reported incidents represent only a fraction of actual cases
- Fear, stigma, and restricted access to services significantly limit documentation
- **Civil society actors remain primary sources of information collection**

3.5 International Engagement Gap

- Predominance of political engagement over rights-based enforcement
- Limited use of sanctions or accountability mechanisms
- Risk of de facto normalization without human rights conditions

4. Legal and Normative Framework

The documented patterns may engage obligations and standards under:

- International human rights law
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) principles
- International Criminal Law, including provisions on **gender-based persecution as a crime against humanity** Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

Ongoing international legal discussions also include proposals to recognize “**gender apartheid**” as a distinct category of systemic gender-based oppression.

5. Policy Recommendations

5.1 For the European Union, UN System, and Member States

- Implement **targeted sanctions** against individuals responsible for or complicit in serious human rights violations
- Strengthen accountability frameworks under international criminal justice mechanisms
- Ensure human rights conditionality in all political and diplomatic engagements
- Support preservation of evidence for future prosecution mechanisms

5.2 For United Nations Mechanisms and International Bodies

- Strengthen mandates of Special Rapporteurs and independent investigative mechanisms on Afghanistan
- Establish secure, long-term systems for documentation and preservation of gender-based violence evidence
- Prioritize survivor-centered justice and protection approaches
- Prevent political dilution of human rights monitoring mechanisms

5.3 For Donors and International NGOs

- Increase direct, flexible funding to Afghan women-led organizations (inside and outside Afghanistan)
- Support secure digital documentation, archiving, and protection systems
- Invest in long-term advocacy and accountability infrastructure
- Ensure sustained support for civil society beyond humanitarian framing

5.4 For Afghan Civil Society and Women's Networks

- Strengthen transnational coordination and protection networks
- Expand secure reporting and documentation systems
- Maintain international advocacy and legal engagement channels
- Amplify survivor-centered narratives while ensuring protection protocols

6. Conclusion

The current situation in Afghanistan reflects a **systemic breakdown of gender equality protections and accountability structures**, with credible concerns regarding **serious gender-based violence, including killings of women, occurring in an environment of widespread impunity**.

Without coordinated international action combining legal accountability, targeted sanctions, sustained civil society support, and rights-based diplomatic conditionality there is a significant risk of further normalization of systemic violations.