

Third update on Taliban decrees and directives relevant to the humanitarian response (July–December 2024)

OVERVIEW

This report provides an update on the decrees and directives that the Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) announced between July–December 2024. It builds upon ACAPS' previous reports on ITA directives and their humanitarian implications, published in April 2023, December 2023, and July 2024.

Between 02 July and 2 December 2024, the ITA issued at least 15 new decrees and directives influencing various aspects of life in Afghanistan. Of these, six were issued at the national level, eight at the provincial level, and one was unidentified.. All appear to expand upon previous decrees and directives.

Many decrees and directives relate to measures of social control and primarily target women. These include the introduction of the new Law of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (LPVPV), along with 14 decrees and directives affecting access to income and employment (4), access to education (4), and measures of social control (6). The last include dress codes and prohibitions on park entry, smartphone use, and religious debate among scholars.

The introduction of the LPVPV has raised concerns, especially among women and humanitarian responders. The law adds legal force to the ITA's moral rulings, largely justified on religious grounds. It has drawn comparisons to similar moral laws introduced during the Taliban's first period of rule (1996–2001). That said, punishments meted out under the LPVPV are comparatively milder than during the first period of rule and mainly involve verbal admonitions and fines.

The new decrees and directives and the LPVPV continue to affect employment, education, livelihood opportunities, and private and public behaviour. They are likely to aggravate the current humanitarian crisis and affect aid access, especially for women and girls. To date, the ITA have not reversed or repealed any prior directives, making the Afghan context one of increasingly diminished rights and freedoms, especially for women and girls, whose access to public life and freedom of movement are increasingly limited.

KEY FINDINGS

- The recent ITA decrees and directives and the LPVPV are likely to significantly worsen humanitarian needs and protection risks, especially for women and girls, women-headed households, and widows who face compounded vulnerabilities owing to restrictions on education, employment, and healthcare access.
- The ban on women's attendance at medical and semiprofessional institutions, coupled with a deficit in midwives and limited access to healthcare for women and girls (who are unable to receive care from male medical practitioners without the presence of a Mahram), will reduce the number of qualified female healthcare providers and aggravate barriers to care for women and girls. It will also further strain Afghanistan's already struggling healthcare system.
- A lack of clarity and ambiguities in the LPVPV – including the lack of references to other statutes and notes on what takes precedence, as well as the lack of clarity around which punishments relate to which offences – may result in inconsistencies in the application of the law and extensive rights violations.
- The introduction of the LPVPV is a signification escalation in restricting individual and collective freedoms in Afghanistan. Rule of law in Afghanistan has long been highly localised. The codification of previously issued decrees and norms (including the Mahram requirement) in the LPVPV and the role of the Muhtasibin (enforcers) in enforcing the law may close critical loopholes that allowed humanitarians to previously negotiate access and programming with religious and traditional leaders.
- The LPVPV has heightened anxiety among humanitarian staff and codified existing restrictions, such as the Mahram requirement for travel. The ban in Kandahar on women's access to smartphones (which could later be implemented nationwide) makes it harder for humanitarian responders to communicate with women and girls; since 2022, there has already been a steady increase in the number of women unreachable by phone. These challenges disproportionately affect women-focused programming, limiting the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Research aim

As the ITA continues to introduce policy measures affecting the daily lives of Afghans and the humanitarian response, ACAPS continues to document and analyse the impact of these decrees and directives. This report is an update to the three published previously and seeks to analyse and contextualise the ITA decrees and directives issued between 2 July and 2 December 2024. These updates aim to provide humanitarian responders with an understanding of the shifting policy environment and the broader implications of these policy decisions.

Methodology

ACAPS maintains a dataset of ITA decrees and directives that are:

- published on the ITA’s official website
- shared across social media
- disseminated through other publicly available sources that track ITA policy updates.

This report examines the 15 decrees and directives logged between 02 July and 2 December 2024. It also draws from existing literature to understand the impacts of various directives on Afghans. In analysing the new LPVPV, ACAPS relied on the preliminary English translations from the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

Limitations

This report is based primarily on an analysis of the English translation of the LVPVPV. As such, all analysis is subject to the potential errors in translation and interpretation of those who translated the law. The report also relies exclusively on secondary research, drawing on a narrow range of publicly available sources. Because many ITA policy decisions are circulated through WhatsApp channels or communicated verbally, there likely exist provincial-level directives that ACAPS was unaware of at the time of writing. Finally, because the law, decrees, and directives were recently issued and there is a lack of evidence about their impact, it is difficult to fully determine their intersectional impact and how they affect women, girls, men, and boys from different socioeconomic classes and in different locations.

The ITA’s policies pertaining to women and men are generally based on signs of puberty rather than a specific age. This means that restrictions can apply based on physical appearance; for example, if a 13-year-old girl appears mature or tall, she may be subject to these restrictions even if she has not yet hit puberty. In this case, where the LPVPV refers to ‘women’ and ‘men’, the report refers to women, men, girls, and boys, as ACAPS considers anyone under the age of 18 to be a child.

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NEW DECREES AND DIRECTIVES, INCLUDING THE LPVPV

On 21 August 2024, the ITA introduced a new LPVPV, ratified by the supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada. The LPVPV is significant not just because it further restricts both individual and collective freedoms but also because it codifies these restrictions and emphasises enforcement. The law's overall aim is to enforce moral behaviour based on the ITA's interpretation of Islamic law and define the role and duties of enforcers (as detailed in Article 2 of the LPVPV Preface) (MOJ 31/07/2024; AAN 31/08/2024). The law also includes regulations that apply to many aspects of public life, including additional regulations on dress codes, personal behaviour, media, and entertainment. The ITA has recently established a provincial delegation to enforce the law in Zabul (Afghan Analyst X 07/10/2024). It is safe to assume that the establishment of other provincial delegations will follow.

The LPVPV's content is reminiscent of the ITA's policies from its first period of rule, including many restrictive measures in public life that particularly affect women and girls (Lee 2018). These measures include the reinforcement of bans on music, tightened control over media, prohibitions on the public display of animated objects, the Mahram requirement, and specific dress codes for women, men, girls, and boys. Although the severity of punishments stipulated in the new law appears significantly toned down from those implemented between 1996–2001. Primarily verbal admonition, fines, and short-term imprisonment, these punishments still pose a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Afghans – especially women and girls. Since the ITA has become increasingly restrictive over the last three years, there are also fears that harsher punishments may be stipulated in the future (OCHCR 30/08/2024).

Besides the LPVPV, the ITA has continuously communicated policy decisions affecting various aspects of daily life in Afghanistan. Drawing from various sources, ACAPS identified 14 additional decrees and directives (see the full list in Appendix 1) issued between 02 July and 2 December 2024 that affect Afghans' social, economic, and personal lives. ACAPS analysed these decrees, directives, and law thematically, following the framework of previous updates. This report also introduces a new subtheme on the regulation of poppy cultivation under the theme of employment and income, with all three main themes as follows:

- access to education
- access to income and employment
- social control measures.

Roles and responsibilities of the Muhtasib (the enforcer) and Muhtasib alaihi (the one on whom the law is enforced)

The LPVPV emphasises the regime's commitment to enforcing strict moral conduct based on its interpretation of Shari'a and lays the foundations for a legal and conceptual framework for enforcement. Article 3 of the law defines ten key terms, which are likely to appear in future policies, reinforcing their formalisation in ITA's governance and law enforcement. Key to understanding the enforcement of the law and related concepts are the terms Muhtasib¹ (the enforcer) and Muhtasib alaihi (the one on whom the law is enforced). While all citizens are encouraged to promote virtue and act as moral observers, the right and responsibility to take formal action remain exclusively with the Muhtasibin, whose appointment depends on the Amir al-Mu'minin (the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) or a person with authorisation from the Amir "to carry out the task of enforcement" (as stipulated in Article 3 of the law's Preface) (AAN 31/08/2024). Article 25 establishes a hierarchical structure for enforcement, dividing roles between directors and commanders. Directors hold authority at the provincial and city levels, while commanders operate at the district and departmental levels, consulting with directors on significant decisions. The law does not clarify whether directors and commanders are Muhtasibin.

Table 1. Key terms providing a framework for enforcement

TERM	TRANSLATION
Ihtisab	Enforcement
Muhtasib	Enforcer
Muhtasib fihi	Actions subject to enforcement
Muhtasib alaihi	The one on whom the law is enforced
Ma'ruf	Virtue
Amr bi'l-ma'ruf	Promotion of virtue
Munkar	Vice
Nahi an il-munkar	Prevention of vice
Ta'zir	Punishment
Shari'a hijab	Islamic veil

Source: AAN (31/08/2024)

¹ While the law uses the singular Muhtasib to refer to enforcers, it suggests the presence of multiple enforcers in different areas (Muhtasibin). ACAPS uses both terms interchangeably, depending on the topic of discussion (AAN 31/08/2024).

mong others, they must be a follower of Islam, adhere to Islamic principles, have reached puberty and be of sound mind, and understand the benefits of virtue. They must also be kind, sincere, and patient. It is worth noting that the attributes highlighted in the law do not include clear requirements for legal or theological expertise beyond “has knowledge of the Islamic injunctions” (AAN 31/08/2024).

Article 11 of the LPVPV explains who the Muhtasib alaihi (the ones on whom the law is enforced) are. This primarily involves individuals who have engaged in prohibited behaviours or have neglected their obligatory Islamic duties (such as their daily prayer or fasting during Ramadan). Muhtasibin also have discretionary power regarding what is considered appropriate punishment. In the case where a Muhtasib alaihi fails to amend their behaviour, they will be referred to a court of law. That said, the law does not clearly lay out which punishments relate to which offences and whether stricter punishments can be imposed as a first step or whether all stages of correction must be followed in order (Articles 24 and 25). It is also not clear what degree of freedom the Muhtasibin and courts have in deciding how strict a punishment to impose (AAN 31/08/2024). This lack of clarity could result in extensive rights violations for small offences.

The lack of detail regarding how Muhtasibin are appointed and their required professional qualifications (rather than personal characteristics) may result in appointments based on political loyalties and that adhere to the ITA’s values and norms. The broad categorisation of actions that make someone Muhtasib alaihi leaves significant room for interpretation. Likewise, the lack of clarity about punishments discussed above may allow for the arbitrary and varied implementation of the law in different areas or according to different Muhtasibin. These ambiguities create room for subjective interpretation, potentially leading to inefficient and discriminatory enforcement and inconsistent implementation across regions and provinces. These uncertainties are likely to contribute to an increasing climate of fear and uncertainty among both community members and humanitarian responders given uncertainty about what are and are not allowed and where.

Social control measures

Table 2. List of social control measures

NO.	DATE ISSUED	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	SOURCE
1	3 July 2024	Mandate for women and girls to comply with the hijab requirement within five days	Daykundi province	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
2	13 July 2024	Ban on women and girls from visiting parks in Gurziwaan district, Faryab province	Faryab province	Amu 17/07/2024
3	23 July 2024	Mandate for female medical college students to wear chadur namaaz	Herat province	Rukhshana Media 23/07/2024
4	21 August 2024	LPVPV issuance	National	AAN 31/08/2024
5	14 September 2024	Ban on women and girls from using smartphones	Kandahar	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
6	19 September 2024	Ban on women and girls from entering parks in Balkh province	Balkh province	KN 18/09/2024
7	20 September 2024	Restriction of scholars and students from engaging in religious discussions and debates	National	TAOV 20/09/2024

The Mahram requirement

Chapter 1 of the LPVPV mandates the requirement of a Mahram. While the Mahram practice predates the ITA and the Mahram requirement has been enforced to different extents since the ITA’s return to power, its inclusion in the LPVPV and its codification suggest that women and girls may be subject to increased surveillance. Chapter 2, Article 20 of the law also bans women’s and girls’ access to public transport if they are not properly covered or are sitting with an unrelated man. At the same time, the restriction requires “an adult male who is a close relative and of sound mind” to accompany travelling women and girls (AAN 31/08/2024). A lack of clarity around the age at which an adolescent male becomes a man and the fact that puberty is a marker for becoming a Muhtasib mean women and girls may be allowed to travel with younger male relatives already considered adults.

The Mahram requirement effectively codifies previous practices (Guardian 15/08/2022; RFE/RL 31/01/2024). This codification reduces the space for interpretation by subnational authorities, enforcing adherence in areas where women may have previously had relatively more freedom of movement. For women-headed households and an estimated two million widows without a close adult male relative, the codification of the Mahram requirement essentially makes them “prisoners in their own homes” (AAN 04/06/2023; RFE/RL 31/01/2024). The Mahram requirement significantly impedes women’s and girls’ right to freedom of movement and the ability of women-headed households to access basic services and humanitarian assistance, aggravating their vulnerability (CARE/UN Women 10/12/2023).

Prohibition on women’s and girls’ use of smartphones

On 14 September 2024, enforcers of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) in Kandahar province instructed imams at selected mosques to relay a ban on women’s and girls’ use of smartphones. A similar directive was issued in Khost province in February 2024, when the ITA banned women and girls from accessing audio-visual media via phones, citing concerns that such use could foster moral corruption and violate Islamic standards (USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a; Rukhshana Media 26/02/2024). Although only an estimated 6% of Afghan women have access to the internet (via a smartphone or other device), the Kandahar directive is indicative of the ITA’s broader approach to controlling and limiting women’s and girls’ access to public space – both online and offline (Gallup 08/03/2023).

A ban on smartphone use will have wide-reaching implications. It will affect women and girls currently accessing education online or using the internet to share resources (Zan Times 16/09/2024; The Diplomat 23/05/2023; Global Issues 10/01/2024). It will also prevent women and girls from participating in online activities, communicating with family and friends beyond the walls of their own home, and engaging in income-generating activities online, further isolating them and likely contributing to a further deterioration in their mental health and social relationships (TWP 03/07/2024; UN Women et al. 06/2023). Finally, it may remove access to a discreet means of seeking help in the face of intimate partner or family violence and limit access to crucial information (including information about humanitarian assistance and health campaigns).

Regulation of individual conduct

Chapter 2, Article 22 of the LPVPV focuses on the regulation of individual conduct, listing 26 behaviours deemed unlawful. Among these are acts of illicit sex, specified as adultery, fornication, lesbianism, anal sex, and paedophilia. The criminalisation of homosexuality is not new; Penal Code 2017 criminalised same-sex activities in Afghanistan before the ITA’s

return to power in 2021 (HDT accessed 18/12/2024). The criminalisation of anal sex poses a direct threat to Afghanistan’s homosexual community and codifies previous discrimination and harassment (HRW 26/01/2022). At the same time, the criminalisation of lesbianism in other contexts has resulted in arrests based simply on suspicion (HDT 05/2016). While it is unclear how this may be implemented in Afghanistan, it may increase risks for women who do not conform to gender norms or choose to remain unmarried for any number of reasons, potentially forcing women into marriage to ensure that they are not vulnerable to such accusations. Evidence on the impact of such laws on Afghanistan’s homosexual community remains extremely limited because of the sociocultural context, making such people extremely hard to reach and resulting in underreporting.

A ban on temporary marriage is also among the regulations on individual conduct. Temporary marriages that are forced or that involve girls under the age of 18 are considered a form of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also occur in consensual temporary marriages with socially or economically vulnerable women (Badran and Turnbull 01/2019; BBC 04/10/2019). It is unclear whether the law will criminalise both parties – including exploited women and girls – or only those who participate in or facilitate exploitative temporary marriages. That said, evidence of the ITA criminalising exploited children in other contexts – such as engaging in bacha bazi or armed conflict – suggests that the same may occur for those exploited or forced into temporary marriages (US DOL 2023).

Article 22 of the LPVPV also includes prohibitions against Muslims befriending non-Muslims or wearing non-Muslim religious symbols (e.g. crucifixes). It is unclear whether the law about these symbols applies to non-Muslims. These provisions risk intensifying the persecution of religious minorities and other communities who may have previously faced or currently face discrimination under the ITA. The determination of friendship remains unclear, but the possibility of allegations of friendship for any social interaction will likely contribute to an increased climate of fear and affect the ability of minorities to partake in social, cultural, and economic activities.

Injunctions on clothing and covering up

In July 2024, prior to the issuance of the LPVPV, two decrees regarding the dress code for women and girls were issued in the provinces of Daykundi and Herat. On 3 July, religious police in Daykundi province issued a circular giving women and girls five days to comply with a new requirement for an ‘Arabic hijab’ (covering everything but the eyes) or face punishment, including imprisonment. Both the woman or girl and her family would be held responsible for violations of the decree, encouraging men and boys to enforce strict conditions on their female relatives (USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a; KN 05/07/2024; Zan TV 03/07/2024). On 23 July in Herat province, students reported that the ITA mandated a new dress code (chadur namaaz,

or a specifically long shawl fully covering the female body) for female students at medical and educational institutes countrywide. Students who do not follow the rule are to be denied entry (Rukhshana Media 23/07/2024).²

Chapter 1, Articles 13 and 14 of the LPVPV take clothing restrictions a step further, codifying countrywide dress codes for both women and men on the grounds of preventing fitna (social disorder) and avoiding chaos. While restrictions apply to both genders, women are subject to more conditions than men. Men and boys are required to be fully covered down to their knees and wear loose clothing. Women and girls must be fully covered, including their faces. Women's voices are to also be concealed, whether "in a song, a hymn, or a recital out loud in a gathering".

Table 3. Rules for women and men in Articles 13 and 14 of the LPVPV

RULES FOR WOMEN	RULES FOR MEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are required to cover their entire bodies. • Women's clothing should not be thin, short, or tight. • Women should cover their faces to prevent fitna (social disorder or chaos that can facilitate sin). • Women are responsible for hiding their body and face from men who are not their Mahram (close relative). • Righteous Muslim women are obliged to cover themselves in front of nonbelieving or "loose" women to prevent fitna. • Adult women who leave the home (for urgent needs) are duty-bound to hide their voice, face, and body. • Women's voices should be concealed (including in song, hymns, or recitations during gatherings). • Women are forbidden from looking at strange or unknown men. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men should be covered from their waist to below their knees. • Men must adhere to the order contained in the first clause of the articles (presumably the dress code above), along with other injunctions related to segregation. • Men are obliged to conceal their bodies as noted above while pursuing pastimes and exercise; men's clothes should not be tight, nor should they make any part of the body (from waist to knees) apparent. • Men are forbidden from looking at the body or face of unrelated women (as per the Article 13 injunctions for women).

Decrees prohibiting women and girls from entering parks

Between July–September 2024, at least two decrees circulated at the provincial level prohibited women's and girls' entry to parks. On 13 July, the MPVPV authorities in Faryab province reissued a ban prohibiting women from visiting three parks in Gurziwaan district; on 18 September, the MPVPV in Balkh province issued a similar ban for parks in the capital city and districts (Amu 13/07/2024; KN 18/09/2024). The justification was to prevent women and men from mixing. Some reports suggest that women and girls are able to visit parks in Balkh, just

on different days as men and boys (KN 18/09/2024). Family outings including at least one adult male (as a Mahram) should still be possible as in other regions. That said, the prohibition makes some families reluctant to enjoy the parks because they are afraid of getting into trouble (AAN 23/07/2024).

Bans on women's and girls' access to parks can be expected in other provinces, increasingly limiting their access to public space. In 2022, the ITA prohibited women from entering Kabul's public parks and, in 2023, certain areas of the Band-e-Amir National Park (Bamyan province). At the time, the justification was that women and girls in parks were not appropriately dressed, including not wearing their hijabs properly (BBC 27/08/2023).

The impact of such bans on both mental health and family dynamics cannot be overstated. Such measures could contribute to a growing sense of isolation and hopelessness among Afghan women and girls. As public parks are also venues for family activities, such as weekend picnics, such bans prevent families from enjoying activities outdoors together for fear that they may be violating a decree. This likely has an impact on family cohesion and the mental wellbeing of female family members.

Regulation of moral conduct in public spaces

Chapter 2, Articles 19, 20, and 21 of the LPVPV regulate behaviour and enforce moral conduct in public and recreational spaces, such as sightseeing areas, transportation, and public baths. The measures include requirements on appropriate clothing in public baths and seating arrangements on public transport. Article 20 also requires breaks during travel for prayer, reinforcing religious obligations in public spaces.

Prohibition on scholars and students from religious discussions and debates

On 20 September 2024, the ITA issued an eight-article directive prohibiting scholars and students from engaging in public religious discussion and debate (TAOV 20/09/2024). The directive specifically bans the publication of topics related to Sufism (Article 5), a mystical branch of Islamic thought. The directive has drawn widespread criticism from religious scholars. Some argue that religious scholars bear responsibility for confronting injustice and condemn the directive as an attempt by the ITA to suppress diverse interpretations of Islam, including recent rejections by scholars of some of the ITA's interpretations, such as declaring women's voices forbidden in public (Amu 21/09/2024). The prohibition of religious discourse and debate further entrenches the ITA's power and the centrality of one religious interpretation over others. It also disempowers religious leaders who do not entirely adhere to the ITA's interpretation of Islamic law.

² On 3 December 2024, however, the ITA issued a new ban on women from attending institutions offering medical education, including for the study of midwifery (HRW 03/12/2024; BBC 03/12/2024; OHCHR 05/12/2024). This is discussed further on page 15 below.

Restrictions on the use of images in media

Article 17 of the LPVPV imposes strict regulations on media, forbidding the publication of images of animated objects, a restriction similarly enforced during the Taliban's first rule (1996–2001). Article 20 bans the playing of music in public transportation. Such restriction reflects an emphasis on controlling public expression. Media censorship also plays a critical role in curbing dissent and preventing the spread of ideas that could challenge ITA ideology (Mehran 18/08/2022).

Access to education

Table 4. List of measures affecting education access

NO.	DATE ISSUED	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	SOURCE
1	15 July 2024	Halt on the enrolment of new students in jihadi madrasas and orphanages	National	Afghan Analyst X 15/07/2024
2	22 August 2024	Prohibition on radio stations from broadcasting educational programmes for students beyond the sixth grade in Khost province	Khost province	Afghanistan International 24/08/2024
3	21 October 2024	Instruction to intelligence groups to investigate and curb foreign funding for Ahl-e-Hadith schools in Kunar province	Kunar province	Afghanistan International 10/11/2024
4	2 December 2024	Ban on women from attending medical and semiprofessional institutions	National	Amu 02/12/2024

Access to primary education

On 22 August 2024, the ITA in Khost banned the broadcasting of educational programmes for grade levels above six, extinguishing one of the few remaining avenues for girls' education. The ban also had an economic impact on Afghan media outlets reliant on offering educational content for revenue (Afghanistan International 24/08/2024).

On 21 October 2024, the ITA in Kunar province forbade Ahl-e-Hadith institutions – Salafi-run schools – from receiving foreign funding. The directive seeks to curb the influence of those whose interpretation of Islam differs from the ITA's and calls for the removal of Ahl-e-Hadith affiliates from government positions. This is part of the ITA's efforts to limit Salafi activities

and reduce their influence in Kunar, which remains a stronghold of Salafi influence. Ahl-e-Hadith groups linked to Islamic State – Khorasan Province have criticised the ITA for not fully adhering to their interpretation of Islamic law (Afghanistan International 10/11/2024). Such a ban highlights the role of education in maintaining ideology and the ideological battles being fought between the ITA and other groups.

On 15 July 2024, the General Directorate of Jihadi Madrasas and Orphanages instructed madrasas across the country to stop enrolling new students for the year. The reasons behind this decision remain unclear (Afghan Analyst X 15/07/2024). This would further restrict young people's access to education, particularly in areas where madrasas are a primary source of education, such as Takhar province, where over 7,400 children and teenagers are enrolled. Some of these madrasas have been specifically established for girls, though the exact number of girls enrolled remains unclear (Amu 13/05/2023).

Access to secondary education

On 2 December 2024, the ITA banned women from attending medical institutions, including training programmes in midwifery, nursing, and other medical and semiprofessional fields. This prohibition effectively shuts down one of the last remaining opportunities for women to receive higher education and further their careers in Afghanistan (Amu 02/12/2024; BBC 03/12/2024).

Both public and private institutions were instructed to suspend women's enrolment immediately after the decree, without further notice regarding when to reopen. There are approximately ten public and over 150 private health institutes across Afghanistan offering educational programmes to approximately 35,000 women students (France24 03/12/2024). Students and educators have expressed despair over the decision, which will not only affect current students but also likely affect healthcare access for women and girls across the country in the long term (France24 03/12/2024; BBC 03/12/2024). The ban will likely have severe mental and psychological impacts on women and girls, as these programmes represented a rare source of hope despite their prolonged social, educational, and economic isolation.

Regulations on businesses, access to employment, and income

Table 5. List of regulations on businesses, access to employment, and income

NO.	DATE ISSUED	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	SOURCE
1	2 July 2024	AFN 5,000 (around USD 70) monthly salary cap for female civil servants unable to perform their duties because of restrictions	National	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 b
2	8 July 2024	Update on salary regulations for female staff	National	TOLOnews X 07/07/2024; BBC X 08/07/2024
3	15 August 2024	Instruction to NGOs to remove the word 'women' from organisational names	Unidentified	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
4	9 August 2024	Reinforcement of the ban on the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics in Badghis province	Badghis province	8AM Media 10/11/2024

Chapter 2, Article 18 of the LPVPV provides additional regulations in respect of the conduct of business by traders, artisans, and farmers. The article primarily focuses on the prohibition of illicit activities (trading in human organs, alcohol, and military equipment) but also emphasises religious and ethical business practices, such as adherence to the prayer schedule and timely payment of zakat³ and ushr.⁴ Article 18 reinforces Article 17's ban on the public display of animated objects, specifically in advertising.

Economic regulations regarding women

A series of other decrees and directives has regulated income and access to employment at the national level, specifically for women. On 3 June 2024, the General Directorate of Administrative Affairs of the ITA announced a policy imposing a monthly salary cap of AFN 5,000 (approximately USD 70) for female government employees (8AM Media 03/06/2024). The policy caused confusion, as it lacked clarity on whether it applied only to women prohibited from working and receiving salaries while staying at home or women across different sectors nationwide (CIR 16/07/2024; AAN 29/07/2024). In early July 2024, the Ministry of Finance issued two follow-up decisions to clarify. On 2 July, the acting Deputy Minister of Finance issued a circular stating that all female civil servants, whether in budgetary or nonbudgetary

³ An annual alms tax

⁴ A tax on harvest

⁵ In 2024, opium cultivation in Afghanistan was 93% lower than the pre-ban baseline in 2022, despite a 19% increase compared to the previous year. The economic value of the 2024 opium harvest was estimated at approximately USD 240 million (an 80% decrease from its pre-ban value but a 130% increase from 2023).

positions, would receive a monthly salary of AFN 5,000 (USD 70). On 8 July, another circular was released specifying that the salary cap only applies to women not performing their duties or reporting to work regularly; women who do report to work regularly would not be affected (USIP accessed 20/11/2024 b; BBC X 08/07/2024). The salary cap affects women working in the public sector who cannot go to the office owing to restrictions. It is unclear whether the policy will be further revised.

The salary cap has sparked widespread frustration as many women – who have been barred from working since 2021 – rely on these salaries to sustain their families. The cap comes on the heels of a previous salary reduction in December 2021, affecting both female and male workers (AAN 29/07/2024). The salary cap has sparked protests by women working in the public sector in Kabul (CIR 16/07/2024). Women's groups have widely condemned the cap because of its potentially detrimental effect on the already diminished economic independence and societal roles of women in Afghanistan (RFE/RL 18/06/2024).

Households reliant on the income of female members will most feel the impact of any salary reduction resulting from the cap, especially those without any male members able to work. The children of women whose salaries are reduced by the cap risk being forced to drop out of school to work in order to help support their families because of increased economic pressure, which already drives child marriage and child labour (including begging) in Afghanistan (UNHRC 15/06/2023; US DOL 2022; RFE/RL 17/05/2024).

On 15 August 2024, the ITA's Department of Economy instructed NGOs to remove the word 'women' from their organisation names (USIP accessed 20/11/2024 b). This is part of the ITA's efforts to remove the presence of women from public space in all forms (ACAPS 21/04/2023).

Prohibition of poppy cultivation

On 9 August 2024, the ITA in Badghis province issued an 11-article decree reinforcing and strengthening the April 2022 national ban on poppy and opium cultivation, which achieved a 95% reduction in national poppy cultivation by the end of 2023 (UNODC 11/2023). The decree for Badghis may have been issued in response to the estimated 19% increase in poppy cultivation in 2024, primarily in the northeast⁵ (UNODC 27/11/2024). It remains unclear why Badghis province was specifically targeted and whether other decrees will expand these same regulations to other provinces.

The new decree lays out the penalties for those involved in narcotics – including poppy and marijuana cultivation. The penalties vary according to size of land and yield – six-month imprisonment for cultivation of less than half an acre and one-year imprisonment for anyone bringing up to 1kg into Afghanistan or apprehended with 5g of drugs of any type (8AM Media 10/11/2024).

The new decree is most likely to affect farmers and labourers in areas where poppy and marijuana cultivation has long been a lifeline for millions of people (UNODC 27/11/2024). Rural women – who often work in poppy fields – may be disproportionately affected because of the lack of other employment options available to them under the ITA’s restrictive policies (ICG 12/09/2024). That said, the high market price of opium following the 2022 ban may incentivise some farmers to return to poppy cultivation despite the risk of higher fines or possible prison time (UNODC 06/11/2024 and 03/01/2024). They may face the fines and imprisonment stipulated in the decree, and harsh measures are likely to be extended to other provinces by the time spring (the planting season) arrives. This risk also highlights the need for sustained international engagement to support enforcement while supporting suitable alternative rural livelihoods.

Farmers, especially smallholder farmers, have suffered from the loss of income from poppy cultivation, which previously generated significantly higher earnings than alternative crops such as wheat. According to UNODC, in 2024, poppy cultivation could have generated an income of USD 30,000 per hectare in Helmand province and USD 18,000 in Badakhshan province. In contrast, wheat yielded less than USD 500 per hectare, while the most profitable legal crop, saffron, generated just USD 3,600 per hectare (UNODC 27/11/2024). Farmers switching to legal crops also struggle with access to seeds, irrigation systems, and markets to sell their products. That said, investment in legal crops for smallholder farmers can yield results and alternatives to poppy cultivation (UNODC 03/01/2024).

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE DECREES, DIRECTIVES, AND LPVPV

Impact on Afghans

The recent decrees and directives and the LPVPV are likely to aggravate humanitarian needs and protection risks, especially for women and girls in general, women-headed households, widows, and minorities. In the first eight months of 2024, Afghanistan’s economy showed signs of recovery – AFN 110.9 billion (approximately USD 155 million) in the first six months of fiscal year 2024–2025. That said, the country still faces severe economic challenges, including high unemployment and widespread poverty (WB 30/09/2024). Policies severely restricting women’s participation in the workforce, along with the recent decision to cap the salaries of female civil servants, will affect both women’s economic empowerment and the national GDP; historically, restrictions on women’s employment have resulted in an estimated 3–5% loss of the GDP (UNDP 30/11/2021).

The ITA’s continued ban on girls’ education remains a significant concern. According to UNESCO’s August 2024 update, 1.4 million Afghan girls have been denied access to schooling, an increase of 300,000 since April 2023. The total number of girls deprived of education – including girls already not attending school prior to the ban in 2021 – is 2.5 million, or 80% of school-age girls. Boys have also experienced a sharp decline in access to education because of economic hardship and the ban on female teachers for boys (UNESCO 15/08/2024). Despite previous promises to reopen schools, the ITA has upheld its ban on girls’ education beyond the sixth grade. This, along with the disruption of alternative educational channels (such as online and the madrasas), has further deteriorated the educational prospects and futures of all Afghan children, but especially girls.

The ban on women and girls from attending medical and semiprofessional institutions will have an impact on both women’s employment and on women’s and girls’ healthcare access. Afghanistan’s existing shortage of midwives – the UN estimates a deficit of 18,000 midwives – and the ITA’s ban on women and girls not accompanied by a Mahram from receiving healthcare from male doctors could seriously imperil women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health, putting their lives at risk (UN 25/08/2024; HRW 12/02/2024; OHCHR 05/12/2024). The country also has one of the world’s highest maternal mortality rates – 620 deaths per 100,000 live births (France24 03/12/2024; UN 25/08/2024; VOA 23/02/2023). The ban will likely aggravate access to healthcare, adding strain to an already-struggling system because of the potential reduction in the number of qualified professionals able to treat patients. It will also likely increase work-related stress among male healthcare workers, who may face an increase in workload and be forced to deny healthcare to women and girls who present for treatment without a Mahram. As Afghanistan’s healthcare system is already overwhelmed, any reduction in staff – current or future – will also have an impact on the overall health system, affecting women, men, boys, and girls.

Policies imposing strict social and moral regulations are deeply harmful to women's and girls' rights and limit access to education, employment, and livelihood opportunities. These decrees and directives will further aggravate the mental health issues experienced by Afghans, and especially by women and girls, leading to more families seeking to leave the country (and opening up new risks related to migration). Overall, the ITA's decrees and directives have resulted in an increasingly restrictive society that stifles personal advancement, education, and entrepreneurship, severely curtailing the earning potential of most Afghans. This, in turn, hampers both individual and collective economic growth and wellbeing.

Impact on humanitarian operations

The humanitarian implications of the law remain uncertain. Some Afghan and international organisations have expressed concerns about the LPVPV, reporting regular visits by the moral police to monitor gender segregation and workers' attendance at prayers. Others have noted that these practices were already in place prior to the law, and the new law has not yet had a dramatic impact on their work. That said, fear and anxiety about added restrictions persist among both female and male staff (TNH 22/10/2024). Humanitarian organisations have also expressed concerns about the law's potential to further erode the already-diminishing rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. The LPVPV represents a significant expansion of the ITA's moral rulings, disproportionately affecting women and girls and severely threatening their futures (OHCHR 30/08/2024; ODI 11/10/2024).

The codification of the Mahram requirement will likely make it more difficult for humanitarian responders to provide assistance to women and girls, though humanitarian organisations have been identifying creative solutions, such as hiring women and their Mahram (either brother, father, or husband) to work together and separating distribution for women and men in communities (GIHA 2022; Mercy Corps 30/12/2023; UN Women 04/11/2024). According to a UN Women survey, over 59% of humanitarians reported that the LPVPV has affected their access to women and girls, linked to staff anxiety related to movement and dress code (34%), women requiring a Mahram to travel to work or the field (23%), and women no longer being able to report to the office (22%). Humanitarian organisations report regional centres such as those in Bamyan, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar as enforcing restrictions across both urban and rural areas (UN Women 04/11/2024).

With increasing limits on women's and girl's freedom of movement outside the home, humanitarians have increasingly relied on phone calls to communicate important information and obtain the views of women during assessments. A series of surveys by UN Women show that the number of women unable to be contacted by phone increased from 12% in December 2022 to 19% in October 2023 and to 27% in September 2024 (UN Women 31/12/2022, 17/12/2023, and 04/11/2024). The latest ban on smartphone use in Kandahar will likely aggravate this trend,

further restricting an increasing number of women and girls from communicating their needs and receiving relevant and targeted humanitarian assistance. The ban on publishing images of animated objects and people could also affect the effectiveness of key humanitarian messaging. Humanitarians often use imagery in their messaging to mitigate low literacy rates (22.6% literacy for women and 52.1% for men in 2022) (UNESCO accessed 12/12/2024).

The codification of the role of the Muhtasib in the LPVPV and the ban on religious debate may result in the closure of some loopholes through which humanitarians have been able to operate – namely, the ability to negotiate engagement and access based on interpretations by religious leaders at the subnational level. It may also affect the ability of humanitarians, including women-led organisations, to negotiate access to or programmes for women and girls (HPN 24/06/2024).

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**APPENDIX 1: FULL LIST OF DECREES AND DIRECTIVES ANALYSED (02 JULY 2024 TO 02 DECEMBER 2024)**

Table 6. List of all decrees and directives analysed

NO.	DATE ISSUED	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	SOURCE
1	2 July 2024	AFN 5,000 (USD 70) salary cap on salaries for female civil servants unable to perform their duties because of restrictions	National	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 b
2	3 July 2024	Mandate for women and girls to comply with the hijab requirement within five days	Daykundi province	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
3	7–8 July 2024	Update on salary regulations for female staff	National	TOLOnews X 07/07/2024; BBC X 08/07/2024
4	13 July 2024	Ban on women and girls from visiting parks in Gurziwaan district, Faryab province	Faryab province	Amu 17/07/2024
5	15 July 2024	Halt on the enrolment of new students in jihadi madrasas and orphanages	National	Afghan Analyst X 15/07/2024
6	23 July 2024	Mandate for female medical college students to wear chadur namaaz	Herat province	Rukhshana Media 23/07/2024
7	15 August 2024	Instruction to NGOs to remove the word 'women' from organisational names	Unidentified	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
8	21 August 2024	LPVPV issuance	National	AAN 31/08/2024
9	22 August 2024	Prohibition on radio stations from broadcasting educational programmes for students beyond the sixth grade in Khost province	Khost province	Afghanistan International 24/08/2024
10	14 September 2024	Ban on women and girls from using smartphones	Kandahar province	USIP accessed 20/11/2024 a
11	19 September 2024	Ban on women and girls from entering parks in Balkh province	Balkh province	KN 18/09/2024
12	20 September 2024	Restriction on scholars and students from engaging in religious discussions and debates	National	TAOV 20/09/2024
13	21 October 2024	Instruction to intelligence groups to investigate and curb foreign funding for Ahl-e-Hadith schools in Kunar province	Kunar province	Afghanistan International 10/11/2024
14	9 August 2024	Reinforcement of the ban on the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics in Badghis province	Badghis province	8AM Media 10/11/2024
15	2 December 2024	Ban on women from attending medical and semiprofessional institutions	National	Amu 12/02/2024