

Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition – Cycle 2

The Second Monitoring Report – An Update

FIRST DRAFT

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Afghan Women's Network (AWN)

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This is the second monitoring report following the baseline study: “Afghanistan: Monitoring Women’s Security in Transition” that was published in June 2013. This monitoring project has been commissioned by the Afghan Women’s Network, funded by Cordaid, to monitor and assess the impact of the ongoing security transition on the overall security, access to rights, and welfare of the women of Afghanistan.

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About APPRO

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization promoting social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. APPRO is registered with the Ministry of Economy (Registration Number: 1212) as a not-for-profit, non-government organization, and is headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan.

APPRO’s mission is to measure development progress against strategic reconstruction objectives and provide insights on how to improve performance against the milestones set by the Afghan government and international donors. APPRO is staffed by personnel with extensive experience in development and scientific research.

About AWN

The Afghan Women's Network (AWN) is a non-partisan, non-profit network of women that serves as an umbrella organization for 112 NGO members, and 5,000 individual members who are committed to support the women of Afghanistan. AWN has offices in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad and works through local partners in several Afghan provinces. Primary concerns for AWN are issues related to: gender-based violence, youth empowerment and girl's education. The network also represents and promotes the views of Afghan women in political and social arenas through advocacy and by challenging Afghanistan's leaders to enforce legislative reforms for the protection of women's rights.

About Cordaid

Cordaid, based in the Netherlands, has a focus on international development and collaboration in vulnerable regions and areas of conflict. Its mission is to build flourishing communities in fractured societies. Monitoring the transition in Afghanistan is part of Cordaid's program on Women's Leadership for Peace and Security (WLPS). This program aims to increase the capacity of women's networks, give a voice to women at the local level in processes of peace and security, and promote the women's agenda in national and global arenas. For more information see: www.cordaid.org<<http://www.cordaid.org>> or contact stj@cordaid.nl<<mailto:stj@cordaid.nl>>

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List of Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOG	Armed Opposition Groups
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DOWA	Department of Women's Affairs
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRU	Family Response Unit
IMF	International Military Forces
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOWA	Ministry of Women Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
VTC	Vocational Training Center

**Executive Summary – TO BE ADDED IN FINAL VERSION OF
REPORT**

Introduction

On March 22, 2011, the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, announced the first tranche of the security transition that will be completed by the end of 2014. After 2014, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will have the sole responsibility for Afghanistan's national security. On 18 June 2013, the launch of the fifth and final transition tranche was announced. Once this last tranche is completed, the 11 final provinces will have completed their transition and the Afghan forces will be in the lead for security across all of Afghanistan.

The rationale behind the transition is to allow the ANSF take charge of their national security, enabling Afghanistan to become a fully sovereign state. The assumption is that the ANSF is now ready to serve its country with an existing pool of qualified people and financial support provided by international military forces (IMF).

Contrary to this assumption, however, evidence from the baseline report¹ of this monitoring study suggests that overall security conditions have deteriorated in some of the transitioned areas as a result of increased attacks on civilians and greater restrictions on civil society, particularly on those that work with women's rights. Findings from the first cycle of this research reveals that many challenges still remain to be addressed, before the Afghan forces are ready to take the lead in the provision of security. Moreover, women's groups are concerned that there is minimal, if any, attention being paid to ensuring that quality milestones are met for the rule of law, governance, access to justice, and security from a gender perspective. Critics are also worried that the security transition is being directed by domestic considerations in IMF and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) countries rather than the actual needs on the ground.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women have increasingly demanded – and received – significant improvements in their access to public services and treatment by their male peers. Some of the most visible signs of progress are the increased numbers of girls attending school and women working in public offices including schools, hospitals and government offices as civil servants. Despite these achievements, however, there are serious concerns regarding the sustainability of these achievements after the IMF/ISAF withdrawal and the security handover to the ANSF.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether there are grounds for concerns regarding a regression of women's rights in Afghanistan as a consequence of the security transition.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess and mark out any possible impact of the security transition over time, along with the decreasing presence of international citizens, on the lives of Afghan women in the following areas:

¹ The baseline report of the "Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition" project is available at: <http://www.cordaid.org/nl/publicaties/afghanistan-monitoring-womens-security-transition/>

- Overall Security and Access to Justice
- Access to Work and Public Life
- Mobility and Access to Services

2. To inform decision makers and other stakeholders – as well as policy – about the concerns of Afghan women related to the above areas that may have emerged or intensified as a direct or indirect result of the security transition.

Methodology

The principal idea of this monitoring study is to visit and re-visit a number of selected districts across Afghanistan in four cycles to trace and observe any possible change in the security situation between the cycles. This report is a product of the second cycle of this monitoring project. Mainly the same people, mostly women that were interviewed in the baseline study were also interviewed in this second round of data collection. It is believed that interviewing the same individuals, to the extent that this is possible, will help with forming a consistency in the observation, and allow tracking changes over time.

Geographic Focus and District Selection Criteria

The selection of the districts and provinces were based on the following three main criteria:

1. Tranche number: nine districts from tranches one and two were selected. The assumption is that those districts that were handed over to ANSF at the early stages of the security transition will better fit the purpose of this study, since change is more likely to be found in a district after a certain amount of time has passed since its transition.

2. Rural or urban representation: the second criterion was established to maintain a balance in the selection between urban and rural area representation. However, when visiting provincial capitals such as Herat City and Jalalabad, the researchers also examined – to the extent it was possible – what was happening in the surrounding districts.

3. Security level: only districts and provincial capitals that were deemed to be safe enough for the researchers to travel to were visited. Ensuring the personal security of researchers while in the field was a top priority.

Table 1: Selected district that were visited in cycle 2 and that will be re-visited in cycles 3 and 4

#	Selected Districts	Province	Tranche	Type
1	Paghman	Kabul	1	Rural
2	Jalalabad	Nangarhar	2	Urban
3	Sorkhrod	Nangarhar	2	Rural
4	Herat City	Herat	1	Urban
5	Dawlatabad	Balkh	2	Rural
6	Balkh	Balkh	2	Rural
7	Aiybak	Samangan	2	Urban
8	Mehtarlam	Laghman	1	Urban
9	Lashkargah	Helmand	1	Urban

During the second round of data collection, some adjustments in the district selection had to be made. First, district Surobi of Kabul had to be replaced with an alternative, because based on the initial findings from this area; the researchers did not consider it likely to find any noteworthy change over time. Surobi was hence replaced with a rural district in Nangarhar,

which is viewed as more fitting the objectives of this study. Second, Khuram Wa Sarbagh, a rural district in Samangan, was replaced with the provincial capital, Aiybak, as a result of administrative impediments by officials in the governorate of Samangan.

Data Collection Tools

This study focuses on exploring changes women experience in their security in the aftermath of the security transition, by using a qualitative research approach. However, the value of quantitative data and its capacity to support and verify qualitative analysis is recognized and utilized to some degree. The methodology used to collect data for this study consists of four key tools:

1. Desk-based research on existing literature that is related to the Afghan security transition.
2. Interviews with a wide range of people from the visited districts, organized in categories (see Table 2).
3. Focus group discussions with three selected community groups: elders, working women and housewives (women that don't work in public).
4. A basic questionnaire to capture women's concerns and thoughts.

To attain an illustrative understanding about women's overall security, mobility, and access to work and public life, informant categories (indicated in Table 2) were identified. In the second round of data collection, 163 individuals (mainly women) were interviewed and 21 FGDs were held in nine districts located in seven provinces across Afghanistan.

Quantitative figures from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), provincial departments of various ministries and family response units (FRUs) were also obtained to support the findings from the interviews and FGDs.

Table 2: Selected Informant Categories for Each District

#	Category	Type of Interview	Targeted # of Informants/District
1	ANP/FRU	Individual Interview	1
2	Prominent Women	Individual Interview	2
3	Businesswomen	Individual Interview	2
4	Women Working in Government Offices	Individual Interview	2
5	Working Women	Focus Group Discussion	1
6	Housewives	Focus Group Discussion	1
7	Community Elders	Focus Group Discussion	1
8	Civil Society Organizations	Individual Interview	3
9	Health Clinics	Individual Interview	3
10	Girls' High Schools	Individual Interview	3
11	Vocational Training Centers	Individual Interview	2
TOTAL			21

Working Definitions

In each district, three overarching themes were identified in an attempt to trace possible change over time in women’s security in the selected districts. The three themes that are assessed in the findings and analysis are defined in Table 3.

Under each subheading, four main markers were established (see Table 3) to be assessed in this report. These markers are evaluated for each district presented in the findings and analysis sections.

Overall security and access to justice are combined in this report because access to justice is a tool to measure women’s overall security. Women’s ability to access legal aid organizations, courts and other justice institutions such as the ANP and FRUs, is considered to be an important indicator for tracking changes to women’s security in general.

Table 3: Identified Themes to Monitor Possible Change in Women’s Security in Transition

Overall Security and Access to Justice:	Access to Work and Public Life:	Mobility and Access to Services:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s sense of security and safety outside their homes • How women currently perceive the ANSF when they have the responsibility of their safety • The level of cooperation and trust between ANSF and the communities • Women’s ability to access legal assistance and justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes observed or reported regarding the ability of women to work in public outside their homes since the security transition without endangering their lives • Attitudes shown by communities towards women that work in public • Availability of employment and training opportunities for women • Increase/decrease in the intensity of threats received by working women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s ability to leave their homes and move from one location to another without male company and without fearing for their personal security • The ability of women to access services such as health clinics and schools • Women’s ability to visit bazaars for shopping • Women’s perceived level of harassment in public places

Access to work and public life is coupled because the two themes are overlapping and one cannot be excluded from the other. Working women have automatic access to public life and vice versa.

Similarly, access to services in the third and final theme is viewed as a tool to measure women’s mobility. Clinics and schools were interviewed to assess women’s ability to reach them, especially in remote areas, and to establish an understanding about whether their ability to reach these services has changed since the completion of the security transition in their respective districts.

Research Limitations – Cycle 2

1. A lack of file keeping and documentation makes it very challenging to access reliable quantitative data from the government offices, clinics, ANP and civil society organizations

(CSOs). Therefore, the graphs used in this study are provided for illustrative purposes only and not as verifiable evidence.

2. Insecurity in some of the districts and provinces made it problematic to re-visit two of the provinces, namely Helmand and Laghman. As an alternative to field visits, the researchers accessed information from these two provinces through phone interviews.
3. Some of the ministries that previously issued research permission letters were less supportive in the second round. Delays in obtaining permission letters caused delays and hindrances in fieldwork.

Overview of Recent Research – Overview from baseline is to be updated and placed in this section in the final copy of this report.

Key Findings from Selected District

Paghman, Kabul

Date of visit for cycle 2:
April 2013

Date of previous visit:
October 2012

Tranche:
1

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Community members in Paghman report that they have not experienced any noticeable change in the security situation of their district. Most interviewees even suggested that they feel safer now in public compared to six months ago in October 2012 when the first round of interviews were conducted. As stated by the interviewees in the first round, the most common fears of Paghman's residents still are suicide attacks and roadside explosions. Although, it appears such attacks have not been common since October 2012, which has contributed to an improved sense of security since the previous monitoring visit in the district. Both housewives and working women reiterated that they feel comfortable and secure when they move in public or when they send their children to school.

"In the past six months the security has improved and now people send their daughters to schools more compared to the past years...In the past, there were foreigner movements [in Paghman] and we had fear of suicide attacks and explosions thinking that if they were attacked it will affect us as well. But right now it is ok and we don't have any fear from ANP."

- FGD, working women in Paghman, Kabul

Paghman's community is supportive of their police and feels that they do not have any concerns with them because, as they explain it, the ANP officers are locals and people know who they are. The main cause of concern is related to the inability of the police to perform professionally and their corrupt behavior. Moreover, women explained that the people appreciate female police officers because they feel more comfortable about letting women police into their homes during house searches.

According to Paghman's FRU, the district has 114 villages, all of which the ANP has access to. Only certain areas were described as having security problems due to AOG activity and movement, mainly from Pakistan.

"Paghman has 114 villages and we have access to all of them but in some areas like the Arghanda area, we have security problems. Suicide bombers and the Taliban come from Pakistan to Maidan and then they reach to Arghanda [from there] and disappear in the area."

- Individual interview, FRU in Paghman, Kabul

Women's access to formal justice is very limited in Paghman. Since October 2012, only three family cases had been reported to the FRU. It is claimed that most cases related to women's rights are solved in the community shuras by the elders and do normally not reach security officials. When women do approach the FRU to report a complaint, the most common way to solve their case is through mediation. It is however very likely that women that do request legal assistance from formal justice institutions would do so in the capital itself, since Paghman is in the vicinity of Kabul City and handing in a petition in the capital would help maintaining some degree of confidentiality and avoid making the case public in Paghman itself.

Access to Work and Public Life

The only places where women are known to work in Paghman are schools, health clinics and teacher training centers. It is claimed that there used to be vocational trainings for women in the past, but no such trainings are currently ongoing despite the demand for such courses among women. People in Paghman do in general not oppose to educated women working in public as long as they respect the Islamic dress code and cover themselves accordingly.

Working women in Paghman currently do not face any particular threats for participating in public life. Despite this, very few women appear to be working in government offices. This could be due the lack of affirmative action by the ministerial departments, to recruit more women as civil servants.

Mobility and Access to Services

Unlike other districts that were included in this study, Paghman's women feel that the level of harassment of women in public has decreased in the past six months since the previous round of data collection in October 2012. Families do not seem to have any specific concerns with regard to their daughters' safety when walking to and from school. Further, the ANP is continuing to show responsiveness towards the security needs of school girls as they patrol the roads after schools close to make sure that girls are not harassed on their way home.

The women in Paghman have not experienced any negative change in their ability to move from one location to another. Likewise, according to health clinics, women continue to access their facilities without difficulties. The majority of the patients are women that visit the clinics in the company of other women or with their children.

"There is no harassment in Paghman district because everyone know each other... Our children and daughters are going to school and if they face harassment they will definitely tell us, but until now it has not happened. After the school day finishes, the police patrol the roads to provide security [for school girls] around the school and on their way back home."

- FGD, housewives in Paghman, Kabul

Jalalabad, Nangarhar

Date of visit for cycle 2:
April 2013

Date of previous visit:
November 2012

Tranche:
2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

The main concern of Jalalabad's ordinary women when they are outside their home continues to be the high level of explosions and suicide attacks that is perceived as having intensified since late 2012. Almost six months after the first monitoring visit, women complain that the attacks occur more frequently. The increased AOG offensive has made women feel a constant fear of possible explosions and suicide attacks when they are in public. Bearing in mind the current situation in Jalalabad, many feel torn between allowing their children to go school, with a certain risk of getting in harms way, or keeping them safe at home but deprived of education.

"If we do not let our children go to school and keep them safe [at home], their future will be spoiled and they will remain uneducated. But if they face an explosion or suicide we will loose them."

- FGD, working women in Jalalabad, Nangarhar

There were no reports of police misconduct towards women in Jalalabad. Elders complained, however, that ANP officers have a rude, reckless and unprofessional behavior in public, which damages their standing among the communities as a respectable law enforcement force. The ANA, on the other hand, is generally held in high esteem among the people of Jalalabad. Despite the disapproval of ANP's improper conduct; most of the women and men included in this study stated that they approve of Afghan forces being in charge of Afghanistan's security, no matter their incapacity. Nonetheless, women and men unanimously appeal to the international community to further support ANA and ANP through additional professional training and the provision of necessary arms.

There are several obstacles in the way of women's access to justice in Nangarhar as a province. According to legal aid providing organizations, corruption in the formal justice system is increasingly becoming a setback. Perpetrators of harmful acts against women seem to be very easily released from detention when they have the right contacts and means. Likewise, access to villages in some of the districts is no longer possible because of increased AOG activity and presence. Legal aid organizations and ANP both confirmed that AOGs are known to intimidate villagers to prevent them from approaching formal justice institutions. As a result, fewer legal cases are reported as being able to reach Jalalabad from rural Nangarhar compared to before the security transition took place. Women and men are for this reason increasingly left with no option but to rely on traditional justice mechanisms in rural Nangarhar.

"Now the police are cooperating with us and we are always in contact with them... But regarding justice departments, the situation is worse. There is more bribery in the system now and those with connections always find a way out of jail and the law. Our access [to remote areas] is limited because there is no good security and the opposition groups against the government are increasing their activities day by day."

- Individual interview, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in Jalalabad, Nangarhar

Access to Work and Public Life

The public perception of women participating in public life by working outside their homes varies, depending on the type of profession the woman in question has. Similar to other provinces and covered by this study, female teachers and health personnel are almost exclusively the only two professions that are highly respected by communities. Consequently, women that work in government offices, NGOs or any other office are often labeled as immoral women that do not respect Islamic values. Not surprisingly, women teachers and health workers did not have any complaints about any negative community attitude against them.

Women with higher visibility and profile, on the other hand, have a much more negative experience as women in public view. Businesswomen as well as prominent women in Jalalabad report that their ability to work and continue their professions has become very difficult. Threat messages delivered to prominent women seem to have increased so much so that some women have been forced to resign.

"I had a female colleague who received threat messages so many times. She finally decided to quit her job. She was warned that if she does not quit her job, they will kidnap her family members, so she resigned."

- Individual interview, prominent woman in Jalalabad, Nangarhar

Moreover, the expanded inaccessibility of rural areas due to intensified AOG activity that has followed the security transition appears to have had a negative impact on the availability of small projects that previously provided work opportunities for rural women. This indicates that a heightened insecurity has contributed to a further alienation and isolation of villagers in Nangarhar, especially the women since they are often the most restricted by cultural barriers.

Mobility and Access to Services

Compared to the previous round of interviews in November 2012, women voiced an increased level of fear when moving from one location to another. The sense of deterioration of public security has also affected women's freedom of movement as well as their access to services. Interviewed schools report that some parents and male family members have started to prevent their girls from attending school, claiming that it has become too dangerous for them to go to school. This could partially be blamed on the intensified AOG attacks and explosions, but also the increased number of criminal deeds such as kidnappings and assassinations.

Women are still able to visit clinics and bazaars, though they do this less comfortably and often in groups of other women and rarely alone. According to some of the women, a declined economic situation that has led to increased unemployment has also contributed to an upswing in harassment of women and girls in public, by male youth mainly. The ANP is, however, praised for patrolling and monitoring the streets to prevent such molestation of young girls and women.

"Yes, of course we are afraid for our children when they go to clinics, bazaars or schools. My husband did not let my daughter go to school when she was in 8th grade because of insecurity. She was [walking] alone and we were worrying about her when she walked to and from school."

- FGD, housewives in Jalalabad, Nangarhar

Sorkhrod, Nangarhar

Date of visit for cycle 2:
April 2013

Date of previous visit:
(First visit)

Tranche:
2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Similar to Jalalabad, the residents of Sorkhrod believe that the security situation of their district in the past six months has changed for the worse with an increased amount of suicide attacks and explosions carried out by the AOG. The fear of being harmed by such attacks has amplified women's anxiety, especially, and increased their discomfort in public.

Women feel comfortable by the presence of ANP in their community. It is for example said that, when women are in Jalalabad, police officers often assist women to cross roads by stopping the traffic and monitor the school roads to ensure the safety of children. However, as in most provinces and districts across Afghanistan, the ANA is more appreciated and respected among the people of Sorkhrod in comparison to the police, which is often associated with corruption.

Both men and women in Sorkhrod are pleased with the security responsibility handover to Afghan troops and police. It was often stated by community members that while ISAF/IMF still conducted operations in their area, many innocent civilians were killed as they were mistaken for AOG members. The number of civilian casualties is perceived as being drastically reduced since the security transition.

"We had a lot of problems when we had foreign military presence, but now we live in peace. When foreigners were receiving reports about the Taliban being in some house, they were attacking that house and destroying everything without investigating beforehand."

- FGD, housewives in Sorkhrod, Nangarhar

Most of women's legal issues are, not surprisingly, solved in one of the many community shuras that exist in Sorkhrod. FRU and ANP are only referred to as a last resort in Sorkhrod. Even when a case does reach the FRU, it is often referred back to a local shura. Some elders also agree that the security officials are not being helpful to women that approach them.

"Our ANA and police provide security and they are respecting everyone, but despite this, I have seen that when women go to family response units, the police are not treating women with kindness... Women have some legal problems like inheritance and other issues. Some families are not willing to pay their rights after the death of her husband... Since the government is not strong, there is no rule of law and law is not enforced on people equally."

- FGD, community elder in Sorkhrod, Nangarhar

It was in general reported by several sources that the religious leaders in Sorkhrod are increasingly promoting women's rights to education and work. It is also claimed that some religious leaders also include messages against gender based violence in their Friday prayers. It is believed that those religious leaders that are employed, supervised and trained by the government are more attentive to the needs and rights of women. This observation is an indication of the importance of institutionalizing the profession of religious leaders to ensure the protection of women's rights, especially in the rural parts of the country.

While Sorkhrod is considered as one of the safer districts of Nangarhar, several of its villages, such as Barkakrak, Koz Kakrak, Brewnaw and Chamtala, were described as inaccessible to the

police and government due to AOG presence. It could be assumed that women living in these villages of Sorkhrod are less likely to access the formal justice system, compared to areas where FRU and the ANP are able to maintain their presence.

Access to Work and Public Life

There were no accounts of any threats against women for working or having a public life. Women in Sorkhrod do in general not work in government offices due to main two reasons. First, it is assumed that there are no women in the district with the necessary education to be qualified for such a position, and second the poor security situation does not allow the presence of government departments in their district. Hence, the women that work in public in Sorkhrod mainly work as teachers at schools or as health personnel, which are the two professions considered as most appropriate for women.

Lack of work opportunities is another challenge. Women believe that increased education opportunities will not be beneficial for women unless work opportunities for graduates are also created. Families do not see any purpose with the pursuit of higher education if their daughters will end up unemployed.

The community perception about women working in public offices, on the other hand, seems to be changing for the better. Much like in other districts across Afghanistan, the residents of Sorkhrod seem to have understood the value of girls' education and the importance of allowing women to work.

"Now people's level of awareness has increased and they permit their children to study and let women work. Sometime ago, I was opposed to schools and women working outside. I had a gun on my shoulder and I was fighting, but when I realized that my children were growing without education I left my gun and an organization built us a school. The same organization also provided tailoring work for women. Now we want our women to study."

- FGD, community elder in Sorkhrod, Nangarhar

Mobility and Access to Services

Women and girls are able to move in public when they are for instance going to school or visiting the health clinic, however they prefer traveling in groups or with their children. The fear of explosions and kidnappings of children are the two primary concerns of women in Sorkhrod, with regard to their own and their children's security when moving in public. Women's ability to travel to the health clinics or schools has not changed since the district was transitioned.

Although there was some degree of harassment of schoolgirls in the past years, this year the level of harassment is reported as non-existent. This is mainly accredited to the ANP that has been actively warning any men or boys that have attempted to bother women and girls in public.

Herat City, Herat

Date of visit for cycle 2:
May 2013

Date of previous visit:
November 2012

Tranche:
1

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Similar to other provinces included in this study, Herat province has experienced security deterioration since the previous field visit in November 2012. Assassinations of opponents and other individuals that defy AOGs have increased in volume, in the provincial capital and the districts, according to housewives and women that work public. The increased number of assassinations and threats has made the lives of women in public much more challenging. Families in Herat have begun to insist that their female family members give up their public life and go back to staying at home.

“By and large, security has decreased. Kidnappings and murder have increased compared to the last year as both men and women are getting assassinated...My family is restricting me more when they see assassinations take place...me especially, since I am a businesswoman and I am working in this society. When I leave home I can't anticipate whether I will come back home in the evening or not.”

- Individual interview, businesswoman in Herat

The sense of security has decreased visibly for the population in Herat. Women especially complain that life in Herat City itself is getting increasingly dangerous for women that participate in public life.

Female civil servants that work in governmental departments are currently advised by security officials to avoid traveling to the districts since this would put their lives in danger. Several of the more populated districts such as Pashtun Zarghun, Guzara, Gulran and Ghoryan have been named by the ANP as districts that they are no longer able to travel to freely due to AOG presence.

Women and elders in Herat continue to have very low degree of trust in the ANP's ability to provide security and protect civilians. ANA continues to be viewed as trustworthy and capable, while ANP is still portrayed as dishonest and incompetent. The training that has been provided to ANA is regarded as more effective and professional.

“Because of fear of explosions and suicide attacks we feel more danger in the last 6 months [since November 2012]. The ANP and ANA are not experienced, educated or qualified. With 6 months training they cannot handle the security. The police officers are addicted and illiterate, how can they understand what the needs of women are?”

- Individual interview, woman working in government office in Herat

Currently, the most common women's cases that reach legal aid providing organizations in Herat appear to be first divorce cases, second gender based violence cases and third the so called “run-away” cases, which implies elopement. Honor killings and beheadings of women accused of dishonoring their families are also reported as getting more common. According to DOWA in Herat, the number of women that approach them and other legal aid providing organizations continues to rise because women are better informed about their legal rights and where to go to receive help. Women are not able to go to the police directly because it is said that women that go to the police without representation receive poor treatment. It is claimed

that the ANP officers do not only ignore women when they request their assistance, vulnerable women are also reported as being abused by them.

Prominent women face an increasing amount of threats by the AOG for defending women and their rights. Furthermore, it is suggested that women continue to be disregarded by the national police forces that show very limited, if any, degree of sympathy for their protection needs. It is claimed that the police is also non-supportive towards women in the sense that their investigations are often biased against women. ANP's initial case assessments later serve as basis for the court's verdict, which limit women's access to impartial justice considerably.

Access to Work and Public Life

Similar to other districts, working women are employed in the health and education sectors continue to be the most respected among the communities in Herat. More and more women are finding employment in government departments, which is also getting increasingly acceptable. Afghan female NGO workers, however, continue to be viewed as indecent and immoral women. According to women in Herat, the perceived level of threat has increased notably among women that work in public. The fear among women has not prevented them from resigning from work yet, however the psychological pressure from this fear of being harmed by those that oppose women's participation in public life is a part of their everyday lives.

Since the security transition took place, job opportunities in Herat seem to have decreased along with it. It was confirmed by the majority of the interviewees that work opportunities have diminished, while the competition to find an employment has increased. The high unemployment among men, which traditionally are the household income providers, has encouraged women to attempt to find work outside the homes. It seems the increased economic hardship that is experienced by Afghan families in recent times may have compelled families to permit women to contribute to the household income by joining the work force in vocations that are customarily seen as suitable for women.

Projects related to women's skill and vocational development remain to be few, in comparison to the years prior to the security transition of Herat in 2011. It appears development projects that focus on creating work opportunities for women are few despite the vast demand among women for such opportunities that would offer them the possibility to help providing for their families.

"The unemployed men encourage their women to work to earn a livelihood and if women cannot find a job they participate in vocational centers to develop a skill... Even though women are worried about their security they continue to work because of the poor economic situation."

- Individual interview, VTC teacher in Herat

Mobility and Access to Services

Clinic staff in Herat reports that those clinics that are located in the remote areas of the province face many security difficulties as they continuously get looted and threatened. Because

of this heightened insecurity, female doctors and midwives are no longer posted in such remote clinics, which has obvious consequences for women's access to healthcare. The clinics that are more centrally located do not appear to be affected by the worsening security situation and continue to receive an increasing amount of female patients.

Women that participated in the focus group discussions claim that the level of harassment of women and schoolgirls has increased in the past six months. The perceived increase in harassment and insecurity does not seem to have prevented families from sending their daughters to school, as yet.

"All mothers are very afraid when their daughters are out of the home and going to school. There are no known kidnapping cases of girls until now, but harassment of young girls in the streets is very common. Girls that go to school out of Jibreil [district] have not left school, but they take a bus [in groups] and don't travel alone."

- FGD, housewives in Herat

The mobility of women living in the central parts of Herat province does not seem to have suffered in any visible way. Women continue to visit the bazaars for their shopping, go to clinics for medical treatment and send their daughters to school. One noticeable change is the increased fear that is detectable in women's narratives related to their presence in public.

Dawlatabad, Balkh

Date of visit for cycle 2:
May 2013

Date of previous visit:
November 2012

Tranche:
2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Since the previous monitoring visit in November 2012, the security situation appears to have changed for the worse in Dawlatabad. The security officials have less access to villages due to increased AOG activity while complaints of police corruption have increased. It was also claimed by some of the interviewees that the police abuse their authority to beat up and detain villagers to release them again upon receipt of money. This conduct is indicating that the police have adopted a more extortive behavior in Dawlatabad since the previous visit to the district, which would have a negative impact on the community trust and willingness to cooperate with the police.

The security forces in Dawlatabad are in general viewed as unqualified, ineffectual and lacking resources as well as equipment to provide and maintain security in the district. On the whole, the security deterioration is blamed on the arming of ALP along with ANP's inability to provide security outside the district center.

"ANA and ANP are very weak and they cannot control the security. They are unable. Also they don't have military equipment or guns to fight with. If there is no security in the villages, how can we consider them as military forces? In the future, if they are not armed, they will not be able to control the security of Afghanistan."

- Individual interview, woman working in government office in Dawlatabad, Balkh

The ANP and FRU officers in Dawlatabad confirmed the security deterioration caused by increased AOG activity along with a reduced law enforcement presence in some of the villages. The ALP continues to be viewed as troublemakers and criminals among Dawlatabad's residents. Villages with an ALP presence are those that are considered as most unsafe. It was further suggested that there is a spill over effect of the unrest from some of the insecure villages, mainly in the eastern part of the district, to areas that was previously considered as safe. The police access to villages has decreased since the previous round of data collection.

"As some of the police officers said, the security of the district is now worse and we cannot go to some of the villages after 4pm. No one can go to these villages after 4pm. The police cannot patrol the far villages because the police force does not have enough officers to patrol 64 villages. Right now we have 70 police officers and also we have a lack of equipment."

- Individual interview, FRU officer in Dawlatabad, Balkh

Corruption and request for bribes is reported as being very common in the police station of Dawlatabad. Women that wish to file a complaint against someone that has harmed them must often pay the commander of the station to proceed with the case. The exact number of women that have complained to the FRU is not clear, as records are still not being kept of the cases. The FRU officers did however inform this study that the majority of the cases that reach them are related to divorce requests, domestic violence and elopements. Mediation is still a very common method to solve women's cases. According to procedure, women are sent to one of the women's shelters in Mazar-e-Sharif only when mediation attempts by the FRU/ANP fail and a woman refuses to return to her family's home. Likewise, the cases remain unregistered and are

referred to the prosecutor's office only after mediation proves to be unsuccessful. This procedure has not changed since the previous round of interviews in November 2012.

Access to Work and Public Life

While some of the more conservative families with low or no level of education, especially in the more remote villages, still tend to prevent their women from accessing higher education and work outside the homes, the majority of Dawlatabad's families that live in the center do not object to women working in public. It appears the main obstacle to women's ability to work outside, alongside the worsening security situation, is the lack of work opportunities. Religious leaders, community elders as well as men in general are reported as being more supportive of women working and contributing to their families' income. NGOs and the international community in general seem to have further decreased their vocational trainings and other skill development projects, which could be due to a deteriorating security situation in the district.

"The demand among women to work outside has increased...educated and uneducated women alike want to work and make themselves busy, but there are no work opportunities for them."

- FGD, working women in Dawlatabad, Balkh

In this round of interviews, women did not report any particular concerns regarding their personal security or receiving threats for working in public. The main complaint was about the lack of work opportunities. Even community elders complained about women not being able to find work, despite being grade 14 or even university graduates. Moreover, corruption and an unfair recruitment system in public offices, such as schools, is still a major issue. It is claimed that potential female teachers have to pay bribes or know an intermediary to be recruited.

Mobility and Access to Services

Harassment of women in public is reported as being uncommon. Women claim that they do not get harassed when they are moving in public and are able to visit the bazaar freely on their own without major concerns. Women that live outside the district center, however, generally travel to the district bazaar or clinic together with a mahram², because the district roads and outskirts are considered as less safe. It appears the ability of women to move freely on their own is largely limited to the district center or the nearby villages.

Security officials have also continued to be proactive to protect schoolgirls from harassment and through regular communication with the schools in the district center. The rural areas are not able to enjoy the same level of protection by the ANP due to lack of resources and personnel, which prevents the ANP from being able to patrol in the remote villages. Likewise, security officials warn religious leaders that have spoken against girls' education or women's rights. Another negative impact of the increased insecurity in remote villages is the decreased mobility of women VTC staff that are no longer able monitor projects in the villages.

² A mahram is a close male relative like a father brother who would not be permitted to marry or have any physical relationship with the woman in question.

“Our female colleagues cannot go to the villages for monitoring of courses because of insecurity and they are worried because the villagers warn them claiming that the Taliban believe they work for foreigners. Such threats have increased and they are not comfortable traveling to some areas...they only go to areas that are still safe.”

- Individual interview, VTC teacher in Dawlatabad, Balkh

Balkh (district), Balkh

Date of visit for cycle 2:
May 2013

Date of previous visit:
December 2012

Tranche:
2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

The security situation in Balkh district seems to have changed for the better in the past five to six months since previous field visit. Working women, housewives and elders all report that they feel safer when they are outdoors and that the AOG presence is less felt. Further, the communities have made an increased effort to cooperate with the security officials to assist them collectively in order to maintain security in their district. According to security officials and community elders alike, the security situation of Balkh has improved mainly because the trust and cooperation between ANP and the communities of Balkh has grown stronger.

"Thank God that compared to other districts security in Balkh is good... here is safer than other districts and the reason is people are unified here... Even in the isolated parts of the district the police cooperate with us and the police station tries to provide security. Girls go to school and women go to the clinics without any harassment."

- FGD, community elders in Balkh (district), Balkh

The ANP in Balkh is facing challenges in extending its services across the district, mainly because it is heavily understaffed. Despite this, women are comforted by the presence of the ANP officers, mainly present in the district center, as they patrol and watch over public space to make sure that people do not come in harm's way. Most people that were interviewed felt that ANSF would be able to uphold the security once the IMF/ISAF withdrawal is completed towards the end of 2014, given that the security officials are provided with weapons and modern military equipment. This prognosis of Afghanistan's post-2014 security situation is very common in most of the districts that were included in this study, and has remained the same since the first round of field visits six months ago.

Even the ALP appears to have improved its reputation among Balkh's residents. In the previous round, most women interviewees expressed fear and intimidation by the presence of ALP in their communities. During the second visit, however, it was noticed that people had grown more accepting of ALP.

"In some villages there are local police, we don't know what they do or how they work, they just come to the police chief and take their orders. We haven't seen any [local] police harassment or disturbance."

- FGD, working women in Balkh (district), Balkh

With regard to women's access to justice in Balkh district, corruption is reported as being the main obstacle to the public's access to justice. It was reported that it does not matter if it is a man or a woman that requests legal assistance, the requests for bribes by justice and law enforcement officials makes the it unaffordable and a wearisome process for the communities. Moreover, there is very little trust in the justice system as the guilty are reported as often being set free since many criminals are able to buy their way free from getting sentenced. Dispute resolution through traditional shuras is often favored by most, as this is the less costly method. The majority of cases that do reach the FRU in Balkh are related to divorce, gender based violence and elopements. The procedure of FRU to solve their cases has not changed since the previous visit to Balkh and mediation is still used as the primary tool to solve family disputes.

Access to Work and Public Life

No particular hostility towards women that work in public was reported in Balkh. Working women feel that most people are supportive of and have respect for women that have an employment and are able to contribute to their household income, especially women that work as teachers. Women that work in government offices are also respected to a large degree while NGOs and any other international organizations are generally considered as a culturally unfitting work place for Afghan women. The increased support to working women may be a result of increased sense of public security, partially through a lesser degree of AOG attacks in their district. It was also insinuated that an increased economic hardship has made people appreciate additional household incomes through female family members that are able to work.

"It is important that our families trust us. We leave home do our work and come back home. In Balkh most [working] women are teachers. We come to school with our Chadori teach and come back home. People see us and they say nothing, but they don't like women working in NGOs. Women who work in NGOs here commute from center."
- FGD, working women in Balkh (district), Balkh

The main complaint of housewives and working women alike was the lack of work and training opportunities in their district. It was claimed that unemployment has increased in the past six months in Balkh. It appears vocational training and skill development opportunities have also diminished over time, which is a major concern for women. It was suggested that the lack of work opportunities have also increased the demand for bribes by people who are in a position to recruit others.

"There are no work opportunities for women and bribery has increased a lot. If a person wants to be a teacher she must pay a bribe of 400-1000 US dollars. Girls study 6 years at the university but they look for work for 3 years. They take a test and get good marks but they won't get the job because someone with a middleman or someone that pays the bribe will get the job."
- FGD, working women in Balkh (district), Balkh

There were no accounts of threats against workingwomen. This could be because very few women work in government offices or NGOs in Balkh. Most women that work either work as health workers or teachers, which are two professions viewed as most suitable for a woman in Afghanistan.

Mobility and Access to Services

Women's mobility and ability to access services such as education and healthcare has not suffered in any way in the past six months. Harassment continues to be uncommon and the police remain active in its efforts to monitor the roads and to protect girls when they are commuting between school and home. Women repeatedly stated that, although they are sometimes scared of walking in public for fear of criminals, the streets and roads of Balkh are in general safe. Women are able to do their shopping in the bazaars and visit clinics on their own. It is mainly women that travel from more remote villages that tend to travel with their male relatives or husbands.

"None of students or female staffs faced any harassment. Three or four months ago boys verbally harassed a few girls. The girls told me about this and we reported to the police. They arrested those boys and now the problem is solved."
- Individual interview, girls' high school staff member in Balkh (district), Balkh

Aiybak, Samangan

Date of visit for cycle 2:
June 2013

Date of previous visit:
December 2012 (Khuram Wa Sarbagh district of Samangan)

Tranche:
2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Samangan appears to be one of the provinces most noticeably changed for the worse with regard to its security situation. The people of Samangan report that since early 2013, the sense of insecurity has intensified. Many of the women that were interviewed in Aiybak voiced a deepened anxiety and fear when leaving their homes and moving in public.

"The feeling of unrest has increased in recent 6 months. When we go to work and come back, we feel insecurity, especially because of the increased rumors about [school] poisoning and suicide... Because people have fear, even if a tire explodes, immediately student's mothers come to school because they think that sound was caused by an explosion."

- FGD, working women in Aiybak, Samangan

Community members in Aiybak reported that the presence and violent attacks by the AOG have increased in the past six months since the previous monitoring visit to Samangan. One interesting variation is the change in peoples' responses regarding their sentiments about the security transition of their province. In the previous round, most women and men that were interviewed in Samangan's Khuram Wa Sarbagh district, expressed satisfaction about the departure of internationals, feeling that their presence had provided them very little benefit. Six months later however, the sentiment is very much changed.

"When foreigners were here, everywhere was safe and calm. But now it seems ethnic war and conflict is starting. People say because the foreigners are leaving Afghanistan, war will start again and we fear this. Also, the government does not attempt to provide security."

- FGD, housewives in Aiybak, Samangan

The national police and military are in general viewed as behaving professionally. Yet, their capacity and ability to provide security is very much questioned. Their numbers are considered as too few, while they are also lacking modern equipment and weapons to be able to oust the AOGs from the province effectively. There is a low confidence in ANSF's ability to provide security in the future due to lack of technical capacity and the few number of security officials.

The ANP in Samangan stated that there are several areas such as Taykhana and Gavdara in Samangan that have AOG presence and unrest. The police are trying to monitor these areas but are not able to do much else because of their few numbers and the lack of sufficient arms. ANP is also making an effort to cooperate with the communities in some of these insecure areas of the province by holding consultation meetings with local community elders and council members.

Women in Samangan feel that they are able to go to the police station to file a complaint should they need to, but not without worrying about somebody seeing them walking in to the police station. There is a societal criticism and stigmatization of women that approach the police when in need of justice.

Legal bodies such as the court and the prosecutor's office in Samangan are reported as having improved their conduct and sensitivity toward women's cases, especially in comparison to previous years. The main obstacle to the public access to justice remains to be corruption. Civil society organizations report that the justice officials continue to accept bribes in exchange for a ruling in favor of whomever that can afford to pay. This is especially detrimental for women's access to justice since perpetrators of violence or other harmful acts can often escape justice and are able to return for retaliation.

Access to Work and Public Life

The attitude of Samangan's population towards women working in public does not seem to have changed in any noticeable way. None of the working women that were interviewed had fears about their safety. Moreover, unlike in other provinces, women in Samangan did not express any concerns related to threats for working in public. The none-availability of work and training opportunities was a repeated concern that often came up during interviews. Many of the interviewees stated that since the transition, skill development and vocational training courses have diminished, along with work opportunities in general, making it very hard to find an occupation for educated and uneducated women alike.

Mobility and Access to Services

The news about female students being poisoned in girls' schools across Afghanistan has had a negative impact on families' willingness to send their daughters to school in Samangan. There are indications of some families not allowing their girls to attend school for fear of their personal safety. Such rumors about potential attacks on female students are reported as being increased in the province.

Most religious leaders in Samangan are considered as being supportive of girls' education as long as girls cover themselves according to the traditional and Islamic custom. Likewise, the police of Aiybak was reported as patrolling the roads in civilian clothing to capture any person that harasses women or creates nuisances for schoolgirls on their way to and from school.

No significant change was found in terms of women's mobility and access to services. Working women and housewives stated that women could go anywhere they need to, such as the bazaar, schools, clinics or friends' houses without any difficulties. Clinics report that the number of female patients that visit them on a daily basis is the same as in late 2012. The main concern that women continue to face is the long distance between numerous very remote villages and the nearest health facility. Some women have to walk more than two hours on foot to reach a basic health center, which was reported as being the main obstacle to women's access to services and ability to move independently.

"Girls were harassed a lot in past years but in the recent year or 6 months, we have police in civilian clothing and a committee that protects girls in public. The people and the education department cooperate with each other to protect the girls. There is not much harassment of women in the bazaar either, this is not like in Kabul."

- FGD, working women in Aiybak, Samangan

Mehtarlam, Laghman

Date of visit for cycle 2:
July 2013

Date of previous visit:
December 2012

Tranche:
1

Overall Security and Access to Justice

In December 2012, the security situation of Laghman had deteriorated particularly since the ANSF took over the security responsibility from ISAF in July 2011. Most of the districts surrounding Mehtarlam, the provincial capital of Laghman, were occupied by the AOG and were inaccessible to the population. The only zone that was still considered as somewhat safe was Mehtarlam itself.

The current situation of Laghman, however, is reported as being slightly improved. The ALP and ANSF have with the assistance of IMF managed to push back AOGs from the occupied districts. The ANSF have also placed police checkpoints in strategic locations. These checkpoints have enabled people's freedom of movement and brought back some degree of security to the province. Despite the improved security situation, in terms of less AOG attacks and increased mobility, women are still very conscious of the risks they take when they leave their homes as the amount of threat calls and letters sent to women that work in public has increased.

During the previous field visit to Laghman in December 2012, women working in public offices and organizations reported that they were unable to go to work for fear of being targeted by the AOGs. Since spring 2013, the security situation appears to have improved to some extent.

"The security has been so critical in the past six months here in Laghman. Rockets have been fired and explosions happened daily against checkpoints. But since checkpoints were placed everywhere four months ago, security has improved. Now government officers and women can go to work...Security isn't fully there, because sometimes Taliban attack checkpoints at night and during the day they fire rockets."

– Individual interview, prominent woman in Mehtarlam, Laghman

Women and elders in Mehtarlam are supportive of the national police and army and feel that the ANP and ANA should be offered more technical support in the form of training and equipment. The need to further support the ANSF is still considered a priority, indicating that the capacity of the Afghan security forces has not changed in a noteworthy way since the previous field visit to Laghman in December 2012.

"The transition may create insecurity because the Taliban is getting more powerful and increasing their reach. Also, the local police who are appointed to provide security are not reliable. They misuse their positions. In the beginning when the local police was formed in Laghman, they were good but they are getting bad day by day because the government does not pay attention to them and is not giving them a suitable salary."

– Individual interview, health worker in Mehtarlam, Laghman

The view of the ALP has however changed. Previously, the interviewees expressed an appreciation of the local police, claiming that they were performing well in their fight against the armed opposition. The conduct of ALP is described as having changed over time. In this round of data collection, the ALP was accused of looting people's private homes, intimidation and using violence against villagers. With regard to harassment of women however, no claims were made against ANSF or ALP. Women in Laghman do not feel harassed or maltreated by the security officials, in the current situation.

The negative impact of the insecurity on women's willingness to approach formal justice institutions prevails. Most cases related to women's rights never reach the formal justice system in Laghman. Instead, they are often referred to community Shuras where local leaders pass judgments according to local customs. When the cases do reach legal aid organizations, the DOWA or the FRU, they are often solved through mediation. Women's cases are only referred to the formal justice system when mediation between the parties fails. Once the women are referred to the judicial departments, they often encounter corruption and requests for bribes, which they can seldom afford to pay.

"Women face a lot of corruption and bribery problems [in justice offices]. Even the doorman won't let a woman enter if she does not pay him... Corruption and bribery are a lot and without money no one solve women's problems."

- Individual interview, businesswoman in Mehtarlam, Laghman

Access to Work and Public Life

The public view about women working outside the home varies in Laghman depending on whether the people live in rural villages or in the center. In the center, religious leaders are known to mention women's right to education and work in their speeches, as long as women respect the Islamic rules and cover themselves accordingly in public. In the rural parts of Laghman on the other hand, the religious leaders are getting increasingly opposed to women working outside of their homes. It was also stated that religious leaders tend to be more conservative in rural Laghman because they themselves feel threatened by the armed opposition, which is held responsible of killing some of the religious figures who have promoted women's rights in the past. The influence of such leaders on the communities' views of women's rights is considered vital. The strong presence of the AOG in rural Laghman influences the content of the religious speeches, which in turn shape the communities' attitude towards women's right to education and work.

"Mullahs' promotion [of women's rights] has decreased in the past 6 months [since December 2012]. Mullahs are afraid because the opposition killed many [religious leaders]. They can't preach because they are afraid of the opposition..."

- FGD, community elders in Mehtarlam, Laghman

The disapproval towards women's right to work in religious speeches appears to be gradually increasing over time since the security transition. It is claimed that it is the increased insecurity that is the primary cause behind this disapproval.

"Mullahs in their speeches about women say that if a man let's his wife leave home to go to work, he should be embarrassed for allowing this. They say that women shouldn't go to work and girls shouldn't study. When our husbands and sons go to the mosque they say mullahs speak about these things. These negative speeches have increased day by day."

- Individual interview, VTC teacher in Mehtarlam, Laghman

Other obstacles to women working in public are the increased threats and continued lack of work opportunities. Although many government offices in Mehtarlam are looking for female employees, many women are reluctant to work in a government office in the current climate of enmity. Tolerance towards women working anywhere but schools and health facilities is reported as having decreased as families have become stricter as a consequence of the conflict

escalation between ANSF and AOG. Moreover, the rural areas have become deprived of development projects related to skill development and awareness raising as a result of security risks. Most projects that are designed to benefit women and increase their work opportunities are limited to the center of Laghman. The implementers deliberately avoid the rural areas due to insecurity and limited access.

Mobility and Access to Services

Women's freedom of movement varies distinctly, depending on whether they are living in Mehtarlam or the surrounding districts. Women in the city report that they are comfortable enough to visit the bazaar for shopping, going to the health clinic or any other location within the city borders, but they prefer to move in groups or with their children rather than alone. Their comfort level in public space has improved slightly compared to late 2012 when the security situation was at its worst, though women still prefer to minimize their movement in public. The freedom of movement that women can enjoy to some degree in Mehtarlam is however limited to the city itself. Women in rural Laghman visit the city for errands only with a mahram that accompanies them. Six months ago in December 2012, people in general could not travel in and out of Mehtarlam. In comparison, the situation has improved slightly.

Girls' access to schools has suffered extensively in recent times. Schools report that families in rural districts are more reluctant to allow their daughters to walk to schools. Also, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit female teachers to schools located outside the provincial center. Fewer girls are reported as being present at school since the security transition took place. The people in Laghman feel that these negative developments are a direct result of the security deterioration that followed the security responsibility handover to Afghan forces by ISAF/IMF. Elders in Laghman has further informed this study that harassment of women and girls in the streets has in general gotten worse, which is another reason behind the increased absence of girls at schools.

Lashkargah, Helmand

Date of visit, cycle 2:
July 2013

Date of previous visit:
December 2012

Transition tranche:
1

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Helmand's overall security situation has declined markedly in the six months that followed the last visit in December 2012. Women that work outside their homes in places like government offices or in the security sector are reported as increasingly receiving assassination threats.

While the ANA still enjoys a good reputation and some level of trust by women and the general public, the ANP and ALP are generally considered as corrupt villains that do not particularly care for women's security. The non-responsive attitude of the ANP in Helmand has created disillusionment among women and the wider public. Women no longer consider it worthwhile to report to the security officials when they are exposed to threats.

According to public, the ANSF are not prepared to take control of security in their province. Most respondents expressed a worry and uncertainty about the future security of Helmand, considering it very likely that the AOG may take full control of the province eventually. The ANA and ANP are reported as unable to provide security in Helmand, as the armed opposition members have increased their intimidation and threat campaigns, especially against female civil servants and security officials. There are also accounts about the AOG members forcing villagers to host them in their homes at gunpoint.

"Our friends in Marja district say that the Taliban come at night and threaten them to let them in to their house. They say if you don't house us we will kill you. We have reported this problem to the council and governor several times but it remains unresolved. They have to house them at night and the military and police can do nothing."

– Individual interview, girls' high school teacher in Lashkargah, Helmand

Only central Lashkargah seems to have preserved a limited degree of security while the districts and villages surrounding the center have become increasingly insecure. The main cause behind ANA's and ANP's inability to drive out the AOG is described as lack of professional training in military combat as well as shortage of military equipment and weaponry.

"We never rely on police and especially not on local police. Most of them are [drug] addicts that sleep while they are sitting in their chairs. The ANP are a little better but they are not ready to assume the security [responsibility] of Afghanistan because they were not trained properly and [they] don't have equipment and tools."

– Individual interview, woman working in government office in Lashkargah, Helmand

Women frequently stated that police officers often harass women and school girls in public. It was reported by several of the interviewees that police often follow women on the back of motorcycles or insist on giving them their phone numbers when encountering them in public. Such unprofessional behavior and harassment of women by police officers clearly undermines their credibility and public trust in their ability to deliver security and justice.

In terms of women's access to justice, the governmental justice institutions are described as particularly weak, inefficient and non-responsive to the public's needs. It was also stated that more traditional courts have been established by the AOG, mainly in the districts but also in central Lashkargah to which communities, including some women, turn to in pursuit of justice.

The credibility of formal justice institutions in Helmand seems to have suffered further during the first half of 2013. Women in Helmand complain that the justice officials in Lashkargah do not offer sufficient assistance when they seek justice. Often, women are being sent from one office to another without knowing who is supposed to assist them with their petitions. According to DOWA officials, justice administrators in Lashkargah are more obliging when women have a legal representative with them. Otherwise they simply get dismissed.

Mediation is the most commonly used method to solve cases related to family disputes and violence against women, by justice and DOWA officials. This is mainly due to the fact that women that face family abuse or other forms of ill treatment have no place to go after they leave their homes. Mediation is therefore considered as the best alternative to help women obtain some degree of justice without getting exposed to further harm.

Other common obstacles in the way of women accessing justice remains unchanged. The very conservative cultural context of Helmand province continues to prevent women to voice their complaints. Most cases that involve women's rights abuse remain within the walls of the family homes. If a woman chooses to make a family dispute public by making a formal complaint, she is accused of dishonoring her family and will most likely be ostracized from her home and community as a result.

Access to Work and Public Life

The amount of women that work in public offices does not appear to have changed much in the past six months since December 2012. Most women continue their work despite an increased fear for their lives. Many women carry spare burqas and shoes when they go to work. By changing burqas and shoes frequently, they try to avoid identification in case someone is following them. This kind of consternation has increased according to many of the women that were interviewed. The increased anxiety is primarily caused by two factors. First, the increased number of targeted women that have been assassinated in recent months have terrified women, making them believe that they could be next. Second, working women that informed this study stated that they now receive phone threats more frequently compared to when they were first interviewed in late 2012.

Communities in the provincial center do not seem to have strong objection to women working outside of the homes at schools, clinics and even government offices. The rural districts were described differently however. Women that leave their home to work are often accused of being involved in immoral deeds such as extramarital relationships. The somewhat open-mindedness that is seen in the center is partially explain by the higher level of education the population in Lashkargah has in comparison to the rural populace of Helmand. It is believed that educated Afghans are more likely to support the education of their daughters but also to show more tolerance to women's rights such as their right to work.

Moreover, while religious leaders in the central Helmand promote girls' education and tolerate women working, provided that they wear the Islamic hijab when in public, their associates in the districts appear to be denouncing girls' education as well as women appearing in public life in any way. It is claimed by women that the critical speeches of religious leaders in the rural Helmand has a significant impact on women's access to education as well as work, since many

community members are adjusting their life styles according to the values and moral codes that are being preached by such religious leaders.

“Mullahs in the center that are paid by the government are good and approve of women’s rights, girls’ higher education and women working. They promote women’s right. But mullahs in the districts and villages do not approve of women’s right and girl’s higher education.”

– Individual interview, woman working in government office in Lashkargah, Helmand

With regard to the availability of skill development opportunities for women, it was reported that compared to late 2012, more projects have been launched and are currently ongoing to provide women trainings in Helmand. It was also claimed that women are now more present as civil servants in government offices. The reports by women in Helmand indicate that despite the many cultural barriers and security threats women are forced to face in public life, women are still willing to take risks and continue pursuing work opportunities to earn a living.

Mobility and Access to Services

Women report that since spring 2013, they have started feeling increasingly distressed and anxious when moving in public. Many of the interviewees reported that while they used to be able to do their shopping at the bazaar on a daily basis in the previous years, they now visit the bazar only when necessary, trying to minimize their movement in public as much as possible. These negative changes in women’s freedom of movement have developed especially after the intensified threat and assassination campaign of the AOG towards women in public life in the past months since early 2013.

As a result of their increased discomfort in public, women are less frequently seen without a mahram when they are travelling to the clinics or doing their shopping in the bazaar. Also, harassment of women and schoolgirls in the streets is perceived as more common compared to the first round of this monitoring study. It was also suggested that schoolgirls often do not mention the harassments they have to suffer in the streets when they get home for fear of being taken out of school by the parents.

“It’s normal that women can’t travel in the city alone because of all the harassment. Even national police harass women. Several months ago while I was going home, a police on a motorcycle followed me for a while as I entered my friend’s home. These incidents happen a lot. Instead of providing security, the police are unethical.”

– Individual interview, Vocational Training Center teacher in Lashkargah, Helmand

Moreover, it is claimed that female clinic staff have started to resign from clinics more frequently as a consequence of the deteriorating security situation of Helmand. This negative development could have serious repercussions for women’s access to healthcare.

Analysis of Women's Security in Transition - Cycle 2

Overall Security and Access to Justice

Changes in the overall security situation across the nine districts vary depending on factors such as the level of cooperation and trust between communities and the ANSF, the spillover effect from insecure villages into secure ones through increased AOG activity and kidnappings and other unlawful activities by criminal groups.

Most districts included in this study, with the exception of Balkh and Paghman, show signs of a heightened sense of public fear, especially among women, when they are outside their homes. These fears are mainly a result of intensified AOG offensives through suicide attacks and other explosions that often harm civilians, but also due to kidnappings and assassinations of individuals that oppose the interferences and normative demands by the AOG.

Key findings of the second cycle of this monitoring report indicate that an increased sense of danger through insecurity has a very negative impact on women's rights and freedoms. Several of the districts show that families have become stricter towards their female family members in terms of limiting their presence in public and demanding that they stay home, under the pretext of keeping them safe.

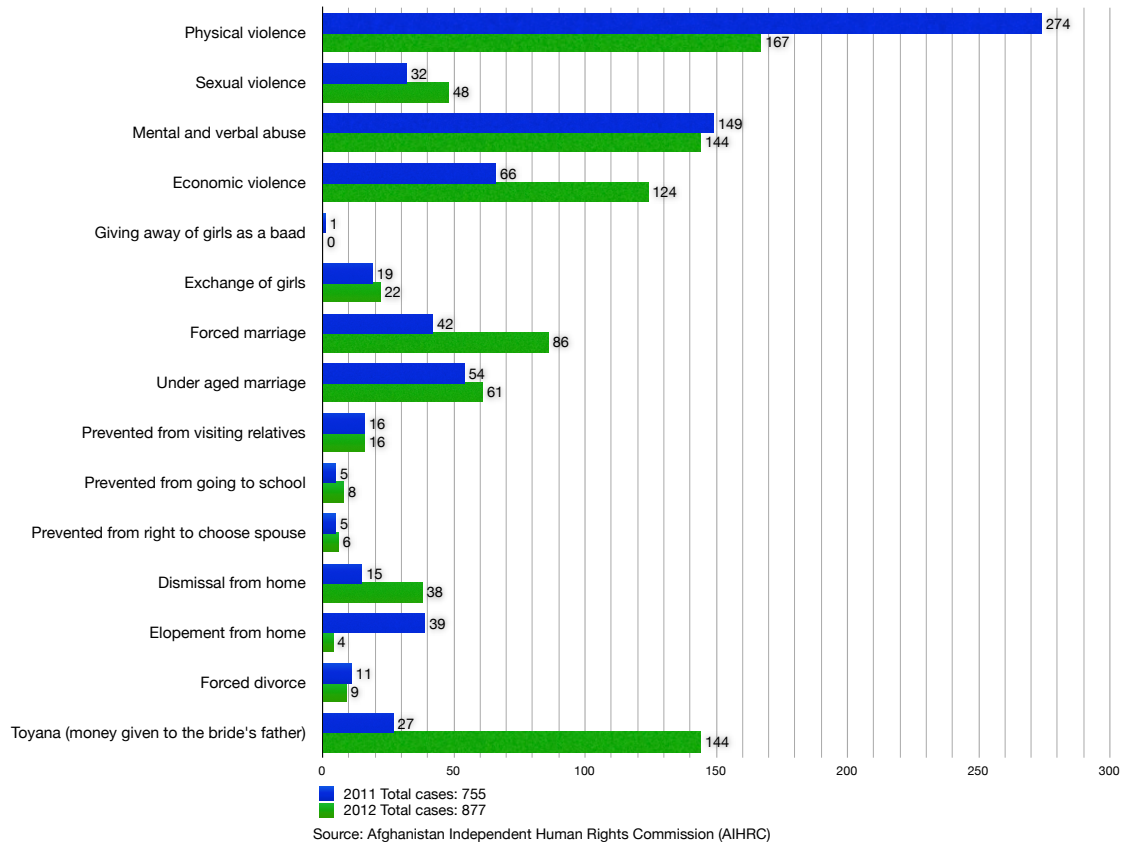
Generally speaking, women and elders across the nine districts continue to be please with the fact that ANP is now responsible for the provision of security in their communities, mainly because they want to see Afghan's in charge of Afghanistan's security. The main complaints, however, remain unchanged since the first visit to the districts, namely the fact that the ANP is still lacking adequate military equipment and training as well as suffering from insufficient number of police officers. In most districts, the police force appears to be understaffed and unable to provide security in its jurisdiction as a whole, allowing spaces for AOGs to exercise their power. This is mainly seen in the more rural areas. Communities continue to call for more training and suitable military equipment for their ANP by the international community, as women and men do not feel that the Afghan police has the capacity to provide security in its current form.

Despite serious public complaint about the ANP, such as accusations of endemic corruption and ineffectiveness, the communities are in general supportive of the police and seem to cooperate with them as a joint effort to provide some degree of security. It could be argued that by cooperating and assisting the ANP in upholding security, the communities are trying to make up for the ineffectiveness of the police force.

Women's inability to reach the formal justice system remains one of the key challenges. Corruption and cultural barriers are two impediments that continue to prevent women from accessing justice. Although justice branches such as the prosecutors' offices and courts have seemingly improved their sensitivity towards women's cases in some regards, the demand for bribes by justice officials appears to remain very much in place. According to legal aid providing civil society members, perpetrators of violence and crime against women often get away without a sentence, if they can afford it. This factor is heavily undermining the credibility of the

formal justice system, which often appears to be a last resort in the quest for justice, even for women.

Graph 1: Violence Against Women Cases in 2011 and 2012 – Herat, Badghis and Nimruz

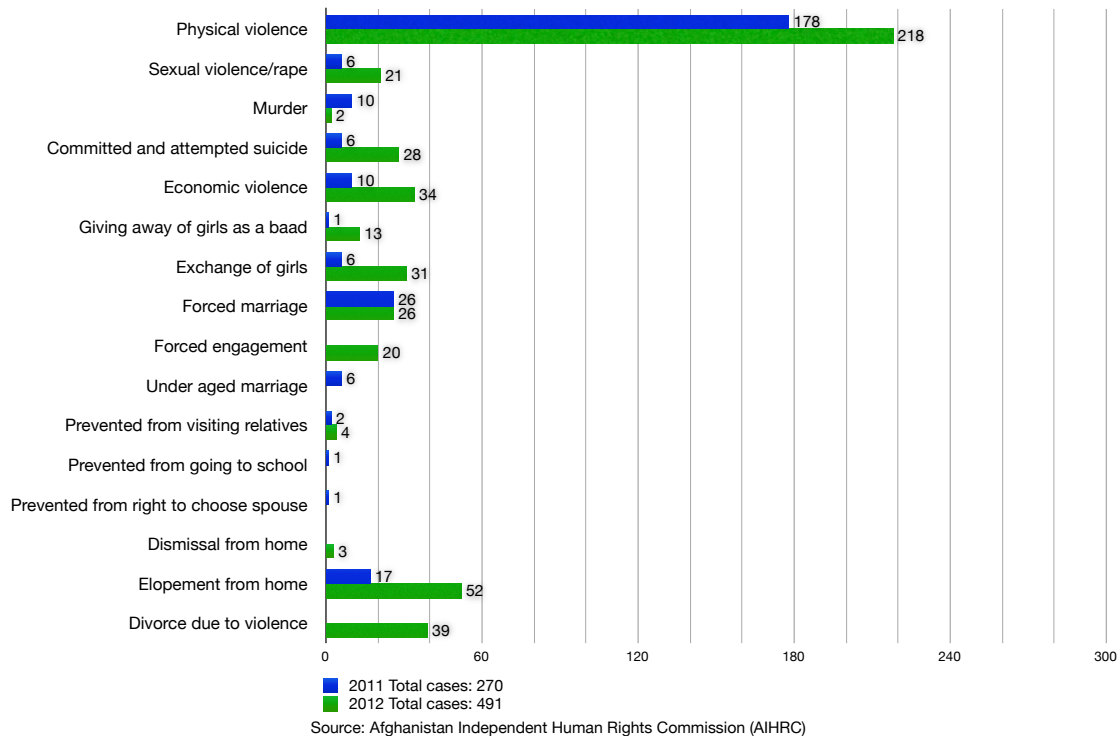


Looking at the data provided by the AIHRC, the number of physical violence cases against women that reached the AIHRC from the provinces Herat, Badghis and Nimruz significantly reduced between 2011 and 2012. 274 physical violence cases were reported from three provinces in 2011 while the number of similar cases had reduced to 167 in 2012 (Graph 1). According to the information in Graph 1, some of the most common types of violence against women cases in Herat, Badghis and Nimruz are acts that physically harm women, mental and verbal abuse, sexual abuse, economic violence³, forced marriages as well as under aged marriages. The fact that economic violence along with the request for dowry money by fathers (Toyana) have increased notable between 2011 and 2012, is an indication of increased poverty, which subsequently could be a catalyst of violence within families. Poverty is in some cases also blamed for the financial desperation that leads to an increased number of forced and under aged marriages, families tend to marry off their daughters at a younger age in exchange for dowry money.

³ Although it is not clearly defined what economic violence is exactly, it could be interpreted as a form of violence that is enacted by the provider of a household, mainly men, who chooses to or is unable to provide money, food, clothes, medicines or other needs of the woman and the family. It could also be a matter of causing hindrances to employment opportunities or forcing a woman unto the street etc.

In provinces such as Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan and Sarepol a similar pattern is displayed, as physical violence seems to be the most common type of violence used against women between 2011 and 2012. Unlike in eastern region of Afghanistan, however, it appears in the northern part of the country, the physical violence against women has only increased between 2011 and 2012. Other more common types of violence are elopement cases, suicide cases, “exchange of girls”⁴ cases and economic cases.

Graph 2: Violence Against Women Cases in 2011 and 2012 – Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan and Sarepol



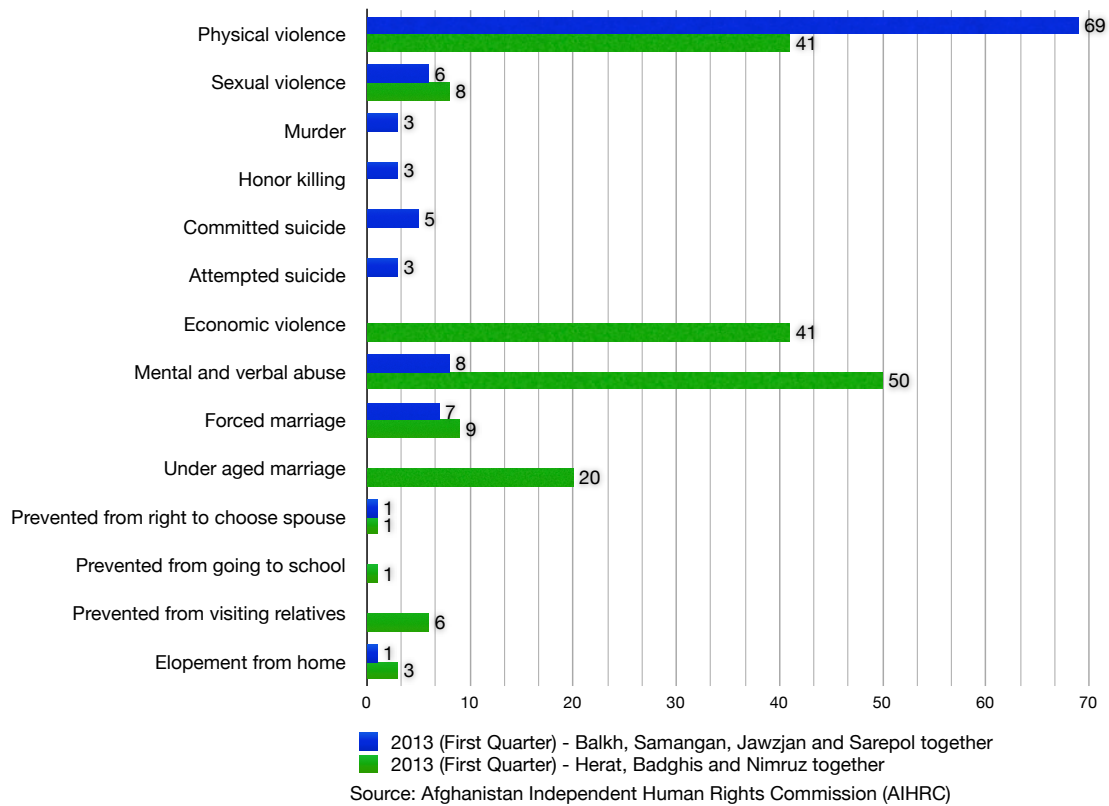
When comparing the two regions, the north and the east (Graph 3), one can easily see that women in the northern provinces report physical violence more frequently than the women in the eastern parts of the country. Cases related to economic violence, under aged marriage and mental abuse, on the other hand, are some of the more common cases that reach the AIHRC from Herat, Badghis and Nimruz.

Graphs 4 and 5 show how women’s cases that reach AIHRC from Herat, Badghis and Nimruz and the way they are handled by the organization. They also show the number of women that were placed in shelters. It appears the number of followed cases increased drastically between the years 2011 and 2012, however there is also a sign of more cases being postponed.

The number of women hosted in shelters increased by 18, from 56 towards the end of 2012 to 74 in the first quarter of 2013. This is an indication of more women approaching the AIHRC and other legal aid providing entities to access justice.

⁴ The exchanging of girls between families is a traditional way to settle feuds.

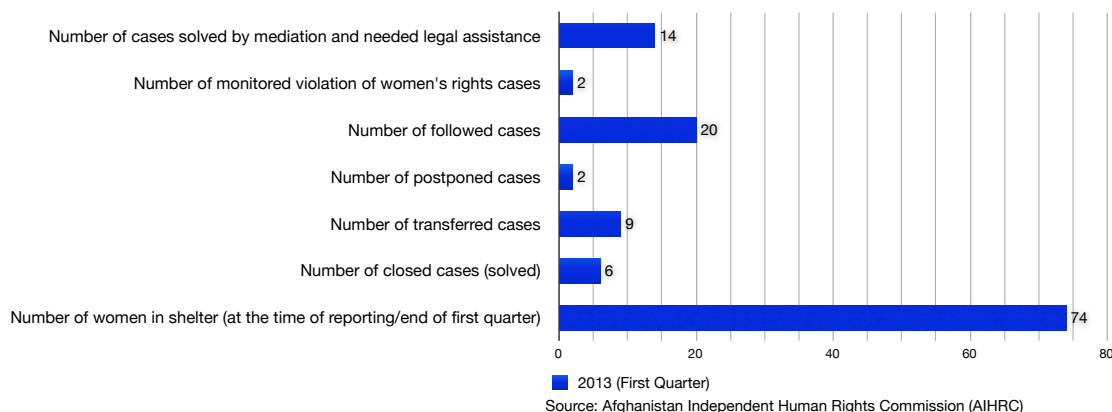
Graph 3: Violence Against Women Cases – First Quarter of 2013



Graph 4: AIHRC Management of Violence Against Women Cases – Herat, Badghis and Nimruz – 2011 and 2012



Graph 5: AIHRC Management of Violence Against Women Cases – Herat, Badghis and Nimruz – First Quarter of 2013



Access to Work and Public Life

With regard to women’s ability to work in public without endangering their lives, the findings from interviews show that women with higher profiles, such as businesswomen or other prominent women, are currently experiencing an increased level of danger. The threats directed at women with professions that are considered as traditionally inappropriate, is reported as being increased in the past six months since the previous round of interviews.

The attitudes by communities towards women working in the public domain varies depending on primarily the level of security that exists in the district, the level of education of the families, the type of the profession in question as well as the work place of the women. Segregated environments such as girls’ schools and health clinics, where women work with mainly other women continue to be highly appreciated among communities as work places for women. Although there are signs of government offices being increasingly tolerated as work places for women, the level of tolerance varies between the regions. Provinces such as Herat, Balkh and Samangan seem to be more accepting of women working as civil servants and working alongside men, while more conservative provinces such as Nangarhar and Laghman display a higher degree of stigmatization of such positions for women. NGOs and other international organizations are unacceptable to most people in all of the nine districts, as women that work with foreign men are practically accused of prostitution.

The attitudes of communities also seem to be affected by the mindsets of the local religious leaders. In instances when a religious leader speaks favorably about women’s rights such as their right to education and work, as long as they respect the Islamic values and dress code, communities also tend to be more open-minded and permit women to work. However, in cases when religious leaders oppose women’s rights in their speeches, women’s access to work and education is likely to suffer.

The availability of work opportunities for women, but also for Afghans in general, is reported as being low. Since the security transition, many international organizations have decreased, and in some cases terminated, their programs and trainings. With the cutback of such programs and vocational trainings, the number work opportunities have diminished. Moreover, there are signs of corruption in the recruitment procedures in public service, such as the teaching profession or any other government office, seems to have increased. Women complain that it is almost impossible to find work unless someone is paid a bribe or there is an interference by a middleman.

Mobility and Access to Services

A heightened insecurity in some provinces such as Herat, Nangarhar and Helmand has made women more mindful of their movements in public. Women health personnel in some of the more insecure provinces are reported as resigning from their jobs, or being relocated from rural areas to the center. It also appears that female teachers are more reluctant to accept posts in rural areas where insecurity has thrived. If this is indeed the case, it would have serious consequences for women's access to health and education services in some of the more remote areas. There are also indications of girls in Nangarhar being deprived of education as a result of perceived increase of insecurity. Some families feel that it has become too dangerous for their daughters to walk or travel between the schools and their homes. The increased public fear is reported as being caused by mainly the increased amount of suicide attacks and explosions, but also kidnappings and other crimes that have become more common.

Women report that they are able to visit the bazaars for shopping, however, they have an increased sense of discomfort about being present in public which seems to have reduced their mobility. It was also suggested that more and more women travel in the company of a mahram or their husbands when they need to run an errand or visit the health clinics. The level of harassment of women and girls in public is perceived as increased in provinces such as Nangarhar, Herat, Laghman and, to some extent, Helmand. It is believed that the rise in unemployment is one major cause. It is also assumed that men and boys without a decent occupation have more time in their hands to molest women and girls.

The ANP in provinces such as Samangan, Balkh, Nangarhar and Paghman were praised for their continued efforts to patrol the roads, especially when schoolgirls are walking to and from school. Such efforts by the police could be viewed as a sign of responsiveness towards the needs of women when exercising their right to accessing public space.

Conclusion

The key findings of this second monitoring report suggest that the security situation in the majority of the examined districts has indeed deteriorated further since the initial field visits approximately six months ago. The ANP is struggling to provide security in the rural regions of the country where they are often lacking personnel, vehicles and weapons to amply patrol their districts, and maintain a monopoly over the use of force. There are also clear signs of AOGs increasing their dominion further, which consequently limits the ANP's outreach. This has serious repercussions on women's access to rights and justice, as women living in areas controlled by the AOG are very likely to live under particularly conservative conditions with very little access to some of the rights that have been attained in Afghanistan in the past decade.

Legal awareness among women has clearly increased. This can be detected from the increased number of cases that reach legal aid providing organizations such as the AIHRC. However, sufficient support and resources are still not made available to shelter the women that dare leaving their homes to escape violence and abuse.

Additionally, as in the first round of data collection and field visits, the increasingly limited access to rural areas is also continuing to deprive rural women of development opportunities. Literacy courses and other skill development courses are no longer able to operate in some of the areas that previously were considered as safe. Teachers and health staff are also growing increasingly reluctant to accept positions in such areas. If the ANSF are unable to reclaim some of the lost ground, which is now under the control of AOGs, and if ANSF continues to lose ground, more women in the rural villages are likely to suffer by losing basic rights such as the right to education, healthcare and work opportunities.

The anxieties and general fear of working women is more notable in the second cycle. The informants more frequently reported personal threats against women that work in public. For the time being, most women live with the fear and continue to work in public. However, if the pressure from the threats increases in the months and years to come, more and more women may choose to resign, not finding it worth the risk to maintain a life in public.

The mobility of women in the district and provincial centers remains mainly intact. There are indications of some degree of reduced mobility, as women seem to be visiting the bazaar and running errands in public less frequently. Should the level of fear increase in the near future, the freedom of movement, which women are still able to enjoy to a large extent, may suffer further. Likewise, if the sense of insecurity increases, more families may choose to prevent their girls from going to school, not because they are against girls' education, but because they fear for their safety outside the home.

Bibliography