



Global Protection Cluster Statement on the Importance of Women Humanitarian Workers for Protection in Afghanistan

31 December 2022

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) and its four specialised Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) join the international community in calling on Afghanistan's *de facto* authorities to revoke the recent ban on women working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) immediately and without exceptions. The discriminatory ban violates women's human rights and creates serious protection risks for millions of people in vulnerable situations who depend on their work for their survival.

If women are not allowed to work, aid cannot be effectively delivered and protection cannot be ensured. Many programmes and services rely heavily, and often exclusively, on women humanitarian workers to access and serve populations their male colleagues cannot reach, whether it be conducting community assessments that capture the protection and health needs of women and girls, assisting families and protecting children from violence, delivering food assistance to female-headed households, or providing safe and confidential mental health and psycho-social support to women and girls impacted by violence, displacement and conflict.

Implementing the ban will lead to catastrophic consequences for the people of Afghanistan and runs contrary to humanitarian principles, which must always be measured against the principle of do no harm, including with respect to women's basic rights and rejecting discrimination.

The Global Protection Cluster urges the *de facto* authorities to lift the ban, take urgent action to ensure the full, safe participation of women in the humanitarian response and enable them to continue providing life-saving protection and assistance to millions of people in vulnerable situations across the country. Similarly, the right to education for women and girls at all levels needs to be guaranteed. We also call on the international community to:

- Press for sustained and quality access for humanitarian actors to address the drivers of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation and for communities to access safe and appropriate

protection support, in particular women and children. For this, women's participation is indispensable.

- Collectively stand with organizations who are engaging and negotiating with the *de facto* authorities, especially on protection, and with local authorities in charge of humanitarian aid, social affairs, public health and education.
- Closely monitor the protection risks that may be created or exacerbated as a result of the ban, and adjust protection strategies, including programming and advocacy, accordingly.

The Global Protection Cluster and its four specialised Areas of Responsibility will continue to stand alongside people affected by the crisis and our partners in Afghanistan and other humanitarian emergencies.

For further information, please contact Samuel Cheung, Global Protection Cluster Coordinator, at gpc@unhcr.org.

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) is a network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and United Nations (UN) agencies, engaged in protection work in humanitarian crises including armed conflict and climate change related disasters. The GPC unites members, partners and communities working on the full gamut of protection activities, including in four specialized Areas of Responsibility (AoRs): Child Protection (CP), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Housing, Land and Property (HLP) and Mine Action (MA). Additional information available here: <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/>