

# Effectiveness of the EU Support to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Afghanistan

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University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Political Science  
Graduate Study of political Science - Master of European Studies

# Effectiveness of the EU support to gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan

Master's Thesis

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# Effectiveness of the EU support to gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan

Master's Thesis

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Zagreb

September 2021

I declare that I have written my graduate thesis Effectiveness of the EU supports to gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan that I submitted to my mentor prof.dr.sc. Igor Vidačak for evaluation, independently and that it is entirely in my authorship. I also declare that the paper in question has not been published or used to fulfil teaching obligations at this or any other institution of higher learning, and that I did not obtain ECTS credits based on it.

Furthermore, I declare that I have respected the ethical rules of scientific and academic work, particularly Article 16-19 of the Code of Ethics of the University of Zagreb.

Sodaba Najib

## **Abbreviations**

AIHRC: Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission

ANA: Afghan National Army

ANP: Afghan National Police

APSM: Afghanistan Peace Support Mechanism

CAPD: European Union and Afghanistan sign Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development

DAW: Women's Development Department

EUPOL: European Union Police

EU: European union

INSTRAW: International Educational and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

LOTFA: Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSAGI: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Gender

US: United State

UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNICEF: United Nations International Children and Education Fund

UNIFEM: United Nations Fund for Women

UN: United Nation

UNIFEM: United Nations Fund for Women

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## **1. Introduction**

The European Union (EU) has been one of the financial and political backers and indeed founders of democracy in Afghanistan alongside the United States since 2001. The EU's policy towards the 20-year-old government of Afghanistan has been clearly focused on pursuing its investments in a democratic, non-violent and non-extremist Afghanistan, while the Union's financial assistance to protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially the rights of Afghan women, has been significant. The EU's support to the gender equality in Afghanistan has been a rather hot, controversial topic, as it is the case with many similar foreign donors' supported efforts of promotion of democracy and human rights.

The focus of this research is on the effectiveness of the EU's assistance to gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan. The purpose of the research is to contribute to better understanding of the EU's presence and support in a very complex environment with a number of challenges in the field of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms.

The main research questions are: What are the main characteristics of the EU's assistance to promoting women rights in Afghanistan? What factors influence the effectiveness of the EU's support to the gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan?

It is claimed that due to the complexity of the environment and many difficult security, cultural and other challenges, the EU's assistance has been only partially effective.

The methodology of the research will rely on the qualitative analysis of the extensive secondary literature, official EU publications, studies of international organizations, independent CSOs and think-tanks, as well as various scientific articles.

The thesis has been finalized right before the beginning of the very turbulent period in Afghanistan, with the US withdrawal and Taliban's taking over the power in the country. That development has given a completely new context for the reflection on the topic of women rights in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of the external promotion of democracy and human rights in such a challenging environment. It is important to point out that the research for this thesis does not cover the new circumstances after the Taliban's retake of the power which pose tremendous challenges for protection of women rights in the country. Despite this being an obvious new limitation of the research, it is hoped that this thesis will at least contribute to drawing some lessons learned from past efforts of the EU and its partner organizations in empowering women in Afghanistan, but also for similar future EU's efforts in other difficult environments.



This thesis has six chapters and each of them contains several topics. The first chapter will analyze the evolution of the protection of women rights in Afghanistan. The second chapter will explore the main challenges in promoting gender equality after the Taliban era. The third chapter will elaborate the gradual development of the EU policy towards Afghanistan, with emphasis on formal agreements and key programs for women. The fourth chapter is about the main areas of EU support to women rights in Afghanistan: human rights situation of women, education and training, public and political participation of women, women's participation in economic activities, women's participation in the military. The fifth chapter discusses about donor coordination for supporting women rights in Afghanistan, with particular focus on the overall EU budget for women's empowerment, national and international organizations, challenges of international donor coordination for supporting women rights in Afghanistan and dealing with various uncertainties about women's rights in the near future. The final chapter will discuss the main factors influencing the effectiveness of the EU support to gender equality and women rights, including the lack of donor coordination, the lack of capacities of government institutes, the lack of capacities of local civil society organizations, the lack of security challenges, and the corruption. The conclusions will bring the overview of main findings and some reflection about the prospects of the EU involvement in this area in the future.

## **2. Evolution of the protection of women rights in Afghanistan**

Sometimes, in order to realize the true right and to determine the limits of a right, it is necessary to refer to history as the history of human civilization is a scale that can measure the observance of the right in the past and present. When observing the historical evolution of the rights of human beings, women's rights have been in an unbalanced position throughout the centuries, and women have been exposed to a lot of suffering and oppression throughout the centuries, which are very painful and heavy (Stockli, 2014).

If we compare the current situation of women in Afghanistan with the past, we come to the conclusion that the current situation of women is much better than in the 18th and 19th centuries and before, and women are really making significant progress now. In the past, in most civilizations and countries, especially in the Afghan legal system, women did not have good social rights and status, and women were viewed as objects and expected to be very humble and inferior, while their fundamental rights and freedoms were ignored. Below is an overview of the women's rights in several pre-20th century Afghan governments.

The reign of Amanullah Khan: Amanullah Khan came to power in 1919. His rule was recognized by some fundamental changes, most notably Afghanistan's formal independence from Great Britain after about the third short-lived Anglo-Afghan War Rawalpindi Treaty of August 8, 1919, and in 1923 Amanullah Khan granted the first constitution to Afghanistan changed its political system to a constitutional monarchy (Stockli, 2014).

One of the most important aspects of the 1923 constitution was the equality of all citizens and equal access to government jobs. The law also gave boys and girls the right to free education.

Despite the fact that the 1923 constitution had many shortcomings and the rights and status of women in various economic, political, social and cultural fields were low. However, it laid the foundation for great progress in the country and changed the legal system of Afghanistan to one of the most modern legal systems in the region (Stockli, 2014).

Nader Shah's reign: Nader Shah after the conquest of Kabul in 1931 approved the second constitution of the country, the 1931 constitution had a lot of emphasis on Islam and Sharia law based on the Hanafi religion. The law gave some rights and freedoms to Afghan citizens in accordance with Sharia law. In fact, the 1931 constitution was a kind of return to the irrational culture and traditions of the past, which in the past denied the existence of women in all spheres (Kandiyoti, 2005).

The reign of Zahir Shah: Zahir Shah came to power in 1963 and in 1964 drafted the new constitution. This law contained a list of fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms for men and women; Examples of which are as follows: freedom is a natural human right, the right to educational opportunities. Education is the right of all Afghans and is provided free of charge by the government to Afghan citizens, the right to medical facilities. The government is obliged to provide balanced care and treatment services to all Afghans in a balanced way, the right to choose a job and enjoy job benefits. Despite the partial recognition of women's rights in this law, women's rights in this period were still low in various political, economic, social and cultural fields (Kandiyoti, 2005).

The reign of Daud Khan: With the official proclamation of the Republic of Afghanistan by President Daud Khan, after the coup in 1973, Afghanistan became a republic and experienced the fourth constitution. The 1977 Constitution provides for the fundamental rights and freedoms of men and women in some cases, including: equality before the law and the court. All Afghans, men and women, were equal before the law without discrimination or privilege, having the right to natural freedom, the right to vote. Every Afghan who reaches the age of 18 has the right to vote in accordance with the law, freedom to choose housing, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, equality and freedom to choose a job (Kandiyoti, 2005).

The reign of Dr. Najib: This period was also one of the brightest periods for Afghan men and women. Women had many individual rights and freedoms from the government. This period was one of the most progressive periods before the Civil War. Since then, women have not had such rights throughout Afghanistan (Tripathi et al, 2017).

Women's political participation has undergone many changes since then. The rise of the Mujahidin and the beginning of forced migration and the withdrawal of women from political participation, and then the presence of less than a decade of Taliban with religious and fundamentalist beliefs and the return of women to the political and civil arenas last years were issues that woman struggled with (Tripathi et al, 2017).

#### Mujahidin Period (1992 to 1996)

During the Mujahidin era, the issue of women was one of the most controversial issues on which groups disagreed. With the end of the jihad period, we witnessed civil wars, immigration, human rights violations and other challenges which increased the rivalry of various Mujahidin groups, and the consequences that affected women, female homelessness, trafficking in women

and girls, the disappearance of employed women. There were crimes against women, and this group suffered the most in this period (Kandiyoti, 2005).

Taliban period (1996 to 2001)

Talking and writing about the political and social situation of women and gender equality during the Taliban era is a very bitter irony that Afghanistan's political history has memorized. During this period, women's human participation was questioned, let alone political and social participation (Kandiyoti, 2005).

In reaction to the anarchy and warlordism prevalent in the country, and the lack of Pashtun representation in the Kabul government, a movement of former mujahidin arose. Many Taliban had been educated in madrassas in Pakistan and were largely from rural Pashtun backgrounds. The name "Talib" itself means "pupil". Efforts by the UN, prominent Afghans living outside the country and other interested countries to bring about a peaceful solution to the continuing conflict came to naught, largely because of intransigence on the part of the Taliban (<https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/6185.htm> [Accessed on 7 August 2021]).

During the Taliban era, there was a very radical interpretation of Islam that with the rise of the Taliban, women were deprived of all political and social rights and the doors of schools were closed to girls and female teachers were fired. During this period, women were deprived of their most natural and basic human rights. This is why some authors, even without exaggeration, have called the Taliban government "the Afghan Women's Cemetery" (Kandiyoti, 2005).

11<sup>th</sup> of September was the beginning of a new government and a new hope for Afghan women. Following the fall of the Taliban, NATO forces led by the United States, the international community, and the European Union launched a new plan to form a government at the Bonn Conference. Several issues were addressed at the conference: human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and women's rights (Stockli,2014).

The issue of women's participation in politics and society after the Taliban was seriously discussed at the Bonn Conference. Prior to that, women's political and social participation was considered mainly in terms of rights of participation in mass demonstrations and marches (with the exception of the Taliban era). However, elite participation, candidacy, women's membership in parliament, political institutions, and macro-decision-making were not

considered. In the new era, with the enactment of a series of laws and regulations, measures were taken to improve women's participation (Kandiyoti, 2005).

The political and social presence of women in Afghanistan's traditional and patriarchal society has always been problematic. The political and social structure has not allowed women's political and social participation to be naturally tested in the context of the country's political culture. However, the process that began with the Bonn Conference provided a good platform for improving the women's political and social participation, both in the theoretical and practical terms. When analyzing the situation of women in the country in 2021, it is possible to conclude that women have made significant progress in legal protection of their rights during the last few years. It is important to remember that women did not enjoy good social, political, cultural and economic rights for centuries. In Afghanistan, patriarchy has always been prevalent among family members, and men did not value women and women's rights. After the creation of the interim government, Afghanistan became a political and social power, and in this power also created a place for women. This action of the interim government created hope for women and the rights of men and women were proposed. In the constitution, which is the mother of all laws of a country, equal rights of men and women are made in the context of various legal, political, social and cultural issues (Stockli,2014).

### **1. The main challenges after the Taliban era 1996-2001**

Despite the support of the international community, women in Afghan society continue to face numerous challenges which have not yet been resolved. These challenges include, among others, cultural restrictions, domestic violence, discrimination and the dichotomy between men and women in families, lack of individual and social freedom, lack of spouse choice, lack of social and legal privileges for women, weak security laws to protect women's rights, lack of government support for women's freedom, lack of freedom of expression, ban women in social activities and education in remote provinces and districts, no guarantee to prevent harassment, rape at home and outside, underage and unacceptable marriages, political threats to women's political and social work, women's poverty and illiteracy, maternal mortality and poor women's health, increased domestic violence, suicide and self-immolation, field punishment of women by local representatives and the Taliban etc.... (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).

Unfortunately, the responsible institutions and organization of the country have been able to solve these challenges in the social life of Afghan women. Sometimes the available statistics indicates that the amount of these problems has not decreased and in some cases, it is actually

increasing. Because the security situation is not the same across the country. In addition, the culture and society of Afghanistan is traditional, and a man has the right to do anything. A decade of war has changed the citizens of the country in a way that is hard to even imagine. For 18 years, families have not even wanted to accept that the pre-Taliban and Mujahideen era was a safe and good one for both genders. Men and women lived and worked together with intimacy and serenity (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).

### **1.1. Opportunities and achievements of women after the end of Taliban era in 2001**

Women have made great strides in their social life since the fall of the Taliban. The establishment of a democratic government and the values of social freedom and the common role of men and women in the Afghan government and society have all been opportunities to improve women's social life. For example, these opportunities can be described as good achievements in women's social life, the right to go in schools, universities and educational institutions, civic activities at the level of organs, free institutions and parties, the role of women in elections, women's participation in the cabinet and the Parliament of Afghanistan. It is worth mentioning that Afghan women and girls have recently had good national and international achievements in sports and the arts. Also, Afghan women and girls have been successful in business, management, agriculture and other areas (The Asia Foundation, 2016).

The growth and development of social life is also one of the most important achievements after the Taliban's rule. Community development can be successful in a country when it is implemented with the help and participation of all social groups, including women. Among the social groups, women make up half of the country's population and because of their direct relationship with the age groups of youth, adolescents, children and also the influence on the other half of the population, namely men, they are the most important and influential social groups. The contribution of women to local community development has generally received less attention in developing societies (The Asia Foundation, 2016).

## **2. Development of the EU policy towards Afghanistan**

One of the most important aspects of security in Afghanistan is military security. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, military security issues have become complex and multidimensional. In the last three decades, especially threats such as weapons of mass destruction, global terrorism, regional conflicts, immigration, drug trafficking, human trafficking have emerged as new threats and have changed the concept of security and especially military security. Europe, due to its geographical proximity to North Africa and the

Middle East, has always been interested in maintaining regional stability and avoiding the influx of migrants, creating civil wars and intergovernmental conflicts. The European Union and its members have always sought comprehensive and multilateral agreements with all regional actors and have always been more willing than the United States to offer financial support for economic and political developments in the region ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).

"The European Union has a long-term commitment to support the people of Afghanistan on their path towards peace, security and prosperity. Since 2002, the EU has provided more than €4 billion in development aid to Afghanistan, which makes Afghanistan the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance in the world. " ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en)[Accessed on 12 August]).

The events of September 11,2001 accelerated the response of Western governments to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Britain made this the basis of an alliance for Western values; And tried to persuade the United States to fight terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in Afghanistan and Iraq. But France, along with Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg, differed. In this section, the foreign policy of the European Union was reflected in the different foreign policies of the major countries of the EU, and once again showed the incoherence among the members of the EU (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).

As mentioned, the European presence in Afghanistan dates back to 2001 and the beginning of the attacks on this country, and continuous security issues have led to the permanence of the Union's involvement in Afghanistan. The European Security Strategy identifies terrorism, organized crime and the overthrow of the government as issues facing the EU in Afghanistan. Even after several years, despite the Union's assistance to the country in equipping the national army and police, terrorism was still widespread in the country, and according to 2008 statistics, the Taliban continued to be a major threat to the country, while al-Qaeda-organized terrorism remains strong even beyond borders (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).

In recent years, corruption and bribery have prevailed at various administrative and political levels in Afghanistan, and public confidence in the central government has been declining. Another important issue in Afghanistan is drug production. The Afghan government and the international community have emphasized that drug production and trafficking is a major source of instability in Afghanistan. Opium production in Afghanistan has been on the rise.

According to a report, 93% of the world's opium was produced in Afghanistan in 2007. Poppy fields are mainly concentrated in the south, and the cultivation of this crop is one of the sources of income for farm owners and the economic life of Afghanistan. It also supplies 75% of the global heroin market and 95% of the European market heroin. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has increased every year and has made this country more and more a major security threat to Europe. For this reason, EU leaders have made promoting peace and stability the most important goal of their declared entry into Afghanistan, believing that such a goal can be achieved by shaping the structure of government and democracy and supporting the political election process. The holding of various international conferences in Afghanistan was pursued by the Union as a basic solution. During these conferences, the Union sought to build a global consensus to help resolve Afghanistan's problems, and in particular to benefit from the significant capacity of regional actors in this regard. The Union hoped to use the above capacities to develop and implement the process. Implement the structure of democratizing Afghanistan. Germany, Britain, Italy and France, as key members of the European Union, played important roles in such a process (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).

### **2.1. Formal agreements**

Prior to the launch of the ESDP operation in Afghanistan, the Council of the European Union first deployed an investigation team in July 2006 to assess the situation of the Afghan police and judiciary. Finally, on 30 May 2007, the EUPOL mission was approved by the ESDP to assist in the improvement of the Afghan police force. Under the mission, which ensured the establishment of effective and sustainable police arrangements under the ownership of the Government of Afghanistan, 16 Member States assisted in the mission: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Croatia and the United Kingdom. According to the defined mission, the Afghan police had to act in accordance with international standards and within the law. Despite allocating large budgets to advance these goals, the ESDP still faces challenges. Some of these challenges are due to the lack of uncertainty of the European Union regarding Afghanistan, and some are due to the situation in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the role of the European Union in combating terrorism as a serious external threat to the security of the European Union, the need to play a role in global affairs such as the promotion of peace and stability, the spread of democracy and human rights (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020).



The new agreement between Afghanistan and the European Union addresses issues such as trade development, human rights, the fight against narcotics cultivation and trafficking and terrorism, and the strengthening and training of ANA forces after 2014. The long-term agreement between the EU and Afghanistan comes as several other countries have proposed long-term agreements with Afghanistan. The new agreement between Afghanistan and the European Union stipulates those European countries, despite pressure from their nations to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, remain committed to staying in Afghanistan to maintain peace and stability. On the other hand, the European Union believes that achieving stability and peace in Afghanistan requires a long-term political strategy between the EU and the United States that can be approved by countries in the region, especially Afghanistan's neighbors. Key components of this political strategy include engaging with the Taliban, changing US drug policy, and expanding local authority in Afghanistan ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en)[Accessed on 12 August]).

The EU-Afghanistan Partnership and Development Agreement (CAPD) is another EU-Afghanistan agreement. The agreement sets out a plan to promote sustainable development by 2024. The goals of the agreement include fighting corruption, fostering and improving civil law, education and trade. The agreement is the result of a series of conferences on Afghanistan in Bonn, Tokyo, London and Brussels. It stipulates that Afghan women and children have the right to education. Also, the agreement emphasizes ways to combat terrorism, drug production and trafficking, and cooperation on the issue of migrants in line with the EU's demand for the return and admission of illegal immigrants. (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020)

## **2.2. Key programs for women**

The European Union has provided significant financial assistance since 2001 to strengthen the role of women in social activities, especially in the areas of peace. This assistance has been provided in various fields. Afghan women have resumed their activities after years of civil war with the help of this global aid. The European Union and its allies have made significant efforts to strengthen gender equality in Afghanistan. The European Union has stated that it supports the Government of Afghanistan in improving the situation of women's rights and is working to ensure that women play a more active role in the peace process and local activities ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

The EU has key programs for Afghan women in various sectors. You will review each of them in the next chapter. But in short, the key programs of the European Union in Afghanistan are science and knowledge, culture, programs to reduce the death of women, reduce domestic violence, strengthen and promote the social development of women, police, army, medicine, engineering etc... ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

### **3. Main areas of EU support to women rights in Afghanistan**

The European Union has carried out numerous activities in the field of Afghan women in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. These activities have been in different sectors. The main purpose of this activity was to promote and strengthen Afghan women in the community. Because Afghan women were deprived of their natural and social rights for many years, and the cultural community considered the growth of women in all social spheres a disgrace. The other main area which EU had been involved is gender mainstreaming which has been a crucial component of most of the EU's assistance in Afghanistan. From the earliest phase of the intervention, the EU showed its commitment to Afghan women not only rhetorically, rather the EU also provided a political platform for them. The fact that 53% of EU programs had gender equality as one of the most significant objectives illustrates its seriousness ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

With the support of the European Union, Afghan women were able to do many things, and women's activities in traditional society began in groups. They strive every day to learn and serve the community. After years of misery, Afghan women, with the help of the European Union and other national and international institutions and organizations, have enjoyed equal rights. The most important areas in which the European Union has supported women are: improving human rights of Afghan women, education and training, health, social and political participation, participation in economic activities, participation in the military ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

#### **3.1. The human rights situation of women**

A feature of Afghan culture is the ancient culture and patriarchal society of Afghanistan. In many parts of the life of the Afghan people, new phenomena and ideas are observed, which are usually of external origin. These phenomena have affected the lives of people in society. In the

ancient and indigenous tradition of Afghanistan, there have been huge gender differences in both the private and public spheres. The dominance of patriarchal values in Afghanistan's cultural and socio-political tradition has severely isolated women from the realm of decision-making and role-playing, both within and outside the family (<https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-cooperation-ec-gender-annex1-en.pdf> [Accessed on 8 August]).

Violence against women is the product of patriarchal values and the unequal gender distribution of power in the family and society. And it happens when men feel threatened by their masculine authority and patriarchal values. Attitudes, beliefs and patterns of male culture are among the most important structural factors that pave the way for strengthening cycles of violence against women. Violence against women is a confirmation of a certain type of social system and arises from certain social beliefs that make women less important and less valuable than men. And he believes that if there is a challenge in this order by women, it must be confronted with violence. (<https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-cooperation-ec-gender-annex1-en.pdf> [Accessed on 8 August]).

In Afghanistan, women who stand in front of men are often abused and those are the one who has education, work outside the home, or they are students in schools and universities. That is, it is modernity that has increased the potential for resistance among women by equipping women cognitively with values and resources such as education and employment. Education by raising women's awareness of gender discrimination, and employment, by giving women an independent identity, which allows them to emerge from the umbrella of a father or husband. It thus removes women from traditional passivity in the face of domestic and social violence and makes them vulnerable to resistance to patriarchal values and the unequal distribution of power in the family. Thus, men also resort to violence against women's resistance (<https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-cooperation-ec-gender-annex1-en.pdf> [Accessed on 8 August]).

The European Union has many programs in place to address these gender inequalities in Afghanistan, who have worked extensively with Afghan women through civilian and military programs to raise awareness of Afghan women 's human rights. These programs have been implemented through schools, universities, police, the military, legal and judicial offices, and national and international organizations (<https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-cooperation-ec-gender-annex1-en.pdf> [Accessed on 8 August]).

### **3.2. Education and training**

Higher education in Afghanistan is considered one of the most successful developing sectors after the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of a new government. There are currently 17 public universities and more than 70 private universities and institutes throughout Afghanistan, most of which operate in major cities such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Nangarhar and Khost. Although the presence of women in the field of higher education in the country has made considerable progress in the past decade, but their unbalanced presence in the field of work and professions in the country shows negative results in the process of women's empowerment. Although there are no accurate statistics on the working and professional conditions of women with higher education degrees in the country, many of these educated women are housewives, without professional duties, or contrary to their professional field, such as part-time teachers in primary schools ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

The lack of security for the development of the country's economic and development programs, the lack of job opportunities - especially in the women's sector, the lack of regular women's trade unions, political and social insecurity, gender inequalities in the workplace, societal misconceptions about women working outside the home and the lack of families' trust in the workplace can be one of the main reasons for the low presence of educated women in the country's economy. With the continuation of such conditions in the past years, the advancement of the country's economic and development programs has led to a strong dependence on foreign professional and professional labor force. This is especially evident in the female labor force sector, where in many cases even foreign women professionals are reluctant to work in Afghanistan due to security and social problems, resulting in the absence of women in key economic and development positions. The country is being replaced by the permanent presence of men ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

### **3.3. Health**

There has been a lot of progress in women's health in Afghanistan over the past 20 years, but in remote areas women still travel for hours or even days to get to a health center. A report shows "In the last 18 years over 4,000 midwives have been trained and are working to reduce maternal mortality and infant mortality rates, not only in cities but rural areas as well. Infant mortality rate has decreased from 95 per 1,000 live births to 53.2 per 1,000 live births. Life

expectancy has increased from 56 years old to 65 for women and 62 for men. Although Afghanistan still has one of the highest mortality rates in the world, the number of women receiving healthcare during birth has increased to 51%.” (<https://feminist.org/our-work/afghan-women-and-girls/progress-for-afghan-women-girls/> [Accessed on 12 September]). This is while women do not have access to health clinics. Lack of health centers, lack of doctors and female nurses, lack of trust in male doctors has caused many deaths of women across the country. Afghan women suffer from a lack of health facilities each year. Afghan families also rarely allow their wives and daughters to see a male doctor. The traditional culture and incompetence of the government has caused many diseases and deaths of women in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the government and the European Union, the World Bank, and the United States have been working to provide health care to women in Afghanistan. Because women in Afghanistan suffered the most during and after the war. These include establishing health centers for women, campaigning and informing women about health care, providing free health services for women and girls, establishing maternity clinics and encouraging women to maintain health care, and establishing vaccination centers ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

Every year, the EU, through NGOs and organizations operating in Afghanistan, allocates funds to Afghan women and girls to encourage them to attend medical programs. These collaborations have helped women the most. Through these partnerships, Afghan women and girls are turning to education and training programs and working hard to work with other women ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

### **3.4. Social and political participation of women**

The new political system in Afghanistan was established after 9/11 in 2001 to review the social and political participation of women in the country. The demand for the establishment of a democratic system and the attention of this system to the regions is to bring the necessary grounds for increasing the political and social activity of more women in the political and social spheres. Addressing the social and political activities of women in Afghanistan after 9/11 is a pristine and up-to-date debate that has been neglected by researchers. The cause can be traced to crisis, insecurity, civil war, authoritarian ideology and the traditional anti-feminist view of Afghan society. The labor force participation rate in 2014 is 15.7% for women and 79.7% for men. The lack of women's activity is not due to lack of science and knowledge, but the lack of

support from society and the family ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

In addition, many people in Afghanistan believe that women are not suitable for political and social activities and are not able to do so at all. This prevailing belief has been accepted even by many women themselves due to the lack of awareness and historical dominance of men. However, in recent years some governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations have tried to raise awareness among Afghan women and improve their situation (Burik, 2015).

The barriers that stand in the way of Afghan women today are psychological, economic and cultural reasons. People believe that two major psychological factors prevent women from actively participating in politics. Feelings of powerlessness and lack of motivation for political activity because they consider politics complex and synonymous with violence and consider this area beyond their power. Thus, the psychological barriers to women's participation in politics are mostly due to mental factors. Afghan women do not have the mentality of active participants in politics. They do not believe in their political influence because they have not been considered in the political and social life of Afghanistan for a long time and this has become a common habit for them (Burik, 2015).

Second, socio-economic causes are another obstacle to women's active participation in politics, economic and social factors. The role of mother and wife, which is a sensitive and uninterrupted role, devotes the choice of woman to herself and does not give her an opportunity to study and gain political awareness. Unlike men, women do not have enough political experience. Many men have useful political experience because of their type of activity and employment in society. This factor causes women to lose the chance to work outside the home and deprive them of access to financial resources. It will not be possible to work in politics without adequate financial resources. Women who are dependent on funding from the men of their families are less provided with the opportunity to be economically and financially independent and cannot do what they want. Participate freely in the political structure of society based on their financial ability, and this has been an obstacle to their political participation in society (Burik, 2015).

Thirdly, as already said before, another reason that is considered as one of the obstacles is the cultural and customary causes of society, which can be said to be one of the most important obstacles to women's political participation, especially at high levels and qualitative and

effective political participation. Women in Afghanistan today are facing a situation that, on the one hand, raises hopes for their future in this country, and on the other hand, there are challenges and risks in this area that deserve attention ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

Today, many national and international organizations are working with Afghan women to create a mentality for women in Afghanistan. The current government of Afghanistan has given women a proper status and women have played an active role in the political, social and cultural spheres. There are several governmental and quasi-governmental institutions in charge of improving women's rights in Afghanistan which are worth mentioning: Afghan Women's Network, Ministry of Women's Affairs, The Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan and United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The Afghan Women's Network consists of institutions headed by women and all its employees are women. As a representative of women's organizations, the network currently operates in various parts of Afghanistan and defends women's rights by focusing on promoting education and culture (Burik, 2015).

In order to develop women's rights in Afghanistan and create the ground for practical activities to support and improve women's rights, the government established the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2001 at the same time as the interim administration. For the purpose of achieving its basic goals, this ministry supports women in various forms, including research, holding seminars and conferences, and so on... (<https://feminist.org/our-work/afghan-women-and-girls/progress-for-afghan-women-girls/> [Accessed on 12 September]).

The Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan is a national body which, in accordance with the provisions of Article 58 of the Constitution and the Ben 2 Agreement dated 16/3/2002 in accordance with 6 June 2002, with the aim of promoting human rights, Its support and oversight has been established in Afghanistan under the leadership of one of the human rights activists, Dr. Sima Samar, and operates in accordance with the law of its organization and competencies. The Commission has taken many steps to address discrimination and women's rights in Afghanistan (Burik, 2015).

UNIFEM (The United Nations Development Fund for Women) was established in Afghanistan in August 2002 as the Special Fund for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. The main purpose of this fund is to provide direct services to women and girls at risk and victims of violence. Another goal of the fund is to strengthen and enhance the

capacity of government agencies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to protect women at risk and victims of violence at the national level. Overall, with the efforts of these institutions and national and international organizations, the situation of Afghan women has improved to some extent, and due to the improvement of education and empowerment of women in various fields, Afghan women have been able to regain some self-confidence. (Burik, 2015)

### **3.5. Women's participation in economic activities**

The issue of economy, business and livelihood is one of the most basic and essential issues that have always been associated with human life and constitute a major part of human life. Meanwhile, women make up half of the population and can play an effective and constructive role in the country's economy. It can be boldly said that without women's participation in the economy, development and construction are not possible, especially since women entered the field of economic activities earlier than men, and in traditional societies such as Afghanistan, they have played a more prominent role in the economy than men (<https://feminist.org/our-work/afghan-women-and-girls/progress-for-afghan-women-girls/> [Accessed on 12 September]).

In developing countries, most women work in agriculture and related industries, as well as in the domestic affairs of the home. And they work about 16 or 17 hours a day and are directly involved in wealth creation. But today, the complexity of the economy has caused the story of women's activities not to end here, and the requirements of society require women to engage in economic activities outside the home as a partner in the family economy along with household chores. But what exists in third world countries, especially Afghanistan, is that despite the economic potential among Afghan women, due to overt and covert unemployment in society, the possibility of formal employment for women is low. This restriction keeps women at home. But the truth is that Afghan women can move towards an entrepreneurial economy. In today's competitive and market-based economy, which is accompanied by rapid changes in the international environment, the transition from an industrial society to an information society, and the transformation of the national economy into a global economy, entrepreneurship has been used as the engine of economic development. It can play an important role in the economic growth and development of countries, which will increase productivity, create employment and social welfare ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).



In the last three decades of the new political system, Afghan women have contributed to the growth and development of Afghanistan alongside the hardworking men of the country. Working women in Afghanistan with an innovative and creative look and with different skills along with raising good children, as an economic activist can reduce the burden of heavy economic pressures on men. Afghan women entrepreneurs who are engaged in economic activity with a creative vision and high skills as an economic activist and the main factor in raising children, play an important role in the economic cycle of the family and society. Women can use their creative ideas along with their family support to engage in profit-making activities that increase both the well-being of their family and ultimately their community. The sum of these creative and entrepreneurial activities will lead to economic growth and development. But all this requires the support and cooperation of the government and the international community. Because the government has created the conditions for women so that women can turn to governmental and non-governmental jobs in a calm and peaceful environment like men, creating an environment in which women can engage in economic activity is one of the most important factors for sustainable economic growth and development. The European Union has also been active in this field, showing thousands of women each year its support for women's participation in the economy through its training programs. These programs are offered to women through schools, universities, government and non-government agencies ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July]).

Afghanistan's business and economic women, with their home, technical and even industrial skills, can create jobs and create new jobs, large and small. Most Afghan women can work in the carpet, construction, dried fruit, education, health, manufacturing workshops, handicrafts, travel services, exports, imports and services by investing in these sectors not only themselves but also their families and Employ men as well and provide a higher standard of living for each other ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).

### **3.6. Women's participation in the policy and military**

There is a small percentage of women in the Afghan National Police. Although female police officers are considered essential for Afghan women to report crimes and access to justice, there are fewer women in Afghanistan who have access to female police officers. More needs to be done to recruit, train and protect female police officers in the Afghan National Police. This is

an important step in strengthening and protecting the rights of Afghan women and girls and can play a valuable role in developing and creating an atmosphere of lasting peace (Burik, 2015).

There are many reasons why women in Afghanistan are not interested in the police and the army. One of the factors is the insecurity of women in society. Because Afghan society is a traditional society and the participation of women in the army and police is a disgrace. And whenever a woman wants to join the police or the army, she must stay away from her family and community, because being a woman in the police and the army is a disgrace for many families (Burik, 2015)

Second, military women have always been harassed by men in Afghan society and their lives are in danger. Despite all this, we see today that there are women in Afghan society who want to join the military. Because they know that Afghanistan needs a female military force to support Afghan women.

Recently, the Afghan government has made great efforts to encourage Afghan women to join the ANA and ANP, and as a result, many women and girls today are interested in joining the military. Naturally, this cooperation has not been without international support. The international community has also supported this area. Along with the contributions of other development partners, EU support is provided through the Law-and-Order Trust Fund LOTFA, implemented by UNDP ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).

#### **4. Donor coordination for supporting women rights in Afghanistan**

EU and donors from EU member states in Afghanistan have done a lot of work in all areas. It should be said that this assistance was not in vain, and the EU has achieved substantial progress in almost every area of its interventions. One of the areas in which the European Union has cooperated extensively and invested significant donations has been in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment. The European Union has always been leading the donor coordination together with the Government of Afghanistan (Stockli, 2014).

International aid to Afghanistan has been declining for years. The United States, the largest donor has cut aid, and also the United Kingdom has decreased its assistance because of new threats to Afghanistan. The European Union has also been reducing its aid and evacuating a

number of its citizens from Afghanistan due to the security situation and the ongoing peace process (Stockli, 2014).

It is generally considered that the lack of security and donor support could lead to an increase in violence and gender discrimination in Afghanistan. Violence could escalate, and the Taliban could dramatically increase their control. Each scenario would be devastating for women's rights (Stockli, 2014).

The lack of coordination of many donors involved in Afghanistan has been a major concern and the source of various challenges. This chapter will provide an overview of main EU and donors' programs for support to women right protection and women empowerment in the country.

#### **4.1.EU budget for women's empowerment**

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the European Union has played a major role in Afghanistan. It must be said that the “European Union has a long-term commitment to supporting the Afghan people in the cause of peace, security and prosperity. Since 2002, the European Union has provided more than € 4 billion in development assistance to Afghanistan, making Afghanistan the largest recipient of EU development assistance in the world” ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).

The donation was to rebuild Afghanistan and enhance the capacity of men and women in various sectors. In addition, these donations are not one-time, but the European Union has consistently supported and cooperated with Afghanistan in building capacity for men and women and bringing peace. The European Union aimed to deliver its assistance in an effective and flexible way by making use of country systems and having a strong emphasis on local ownership. At the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the EU signed a EUR 200 million State-Building Contract with the Government and provided direct budget support in addition to the high portion of aid delivered 'on-budget' through trust funds. (Allen and Felbab-Brown, 2020)

The money donated has been used in various fields, and the European Union has promised to help and support Afghanistan after the withdrawal of its troops. This means that the European Union has not refrained from cooperating not only in the past but also in the upcoming years. It is worth it to say that EU is one of the top five donors of gross official development assistance

in 2014 in Afghanistan. In 2014 EU Institutions donate 310 million dollars. And Germany donates 525 million dollars. Which was a large sum of money to be paid to Afghanistan by EU members (<https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-cooperation-ec-gender-annex1-en.pdf> [Accessed on 8 August]).

#### **4.2. National and international organizations – EU partners for empowering women in Afghanistan**

Recently, with the escalation of violence in Afghanistan, the situation of Afghan women is in danger. Afghanistan has been a country where women have been subjected to years of violence and gender inequality. These inequalities have paved the way for the reduction of women's activities in society ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August]).

The increase in violence and gender inequality has paved the way for the creation of a series of governmental and non-governmental institutions that have sought to eradicate gender discrimination, reduce domestic violence, and create a secure office space for women. This institution is supported by the government and the international community and paves the way for the growth of Afghan women. ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August 2021]).

##### **4.2.1. United Nations Women**

UN Women is considered the main UN body for gender equality and women's empowerment. With the creation of this body, the members of the United Nations have taken a historic step in accelerating the goals of the organization regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, and this action is considered as part of the structural reform of the United Nations. Four institutions related to women have been merged or integrated with each other for their effectiveness and their duties and missions have been assigned to this organization. These four organizations are:

1. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Gender (OSAGI)
2. Women's Development Department (DAW)
3. United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

4. International Educational and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-afg-annexes-vol2_en.pdf) [Accessed on 1 July 2021]).

Since 2002, UNIFEM established a program in Afghanistan to support the challenge of bringing women and their perspectives into the mainstream of national reconstruction. An important focus of UNIFEM's efforts has been working with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to build its staff capacity and program to advance women's rights. With UNIFEM's assistance, Ministry addressed the challenge of reaching out to women in the provinces through the establishment of Women's Development Centers. These Centers fulfilled an urgent need for safe meeting places for women to discuss their priorities, gain access to social services and improve their education. (<https://unwomenusa.org/progafghanwomen> , Accessed on 1 August 2021)

#### **4.2.2. Women's organization for Women**

Women for Afghan Women (WAW) is Afghanistan's largest women's organization, with more than 850 local Afghan staff across Afghanistan working to empower women, children and families, and to build a country of advocates and allies for women's rights (<https://womenforafghanwomen.org/afghanistan/> [Accessed on 1 August] 2021).

As one of the partners of the European Commission in reaching EU's assistance objectives, WAW's ultimate goal in Afghanistan is to eradicate violence and empower women in society. Afghan women have made remarkable strides and significant progress since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. However, more needs to be done to expand WAW in Afghanistan and increase women's achievements to accelerate the cultural change needed to advance the country. In general, and equality and women's rights, in particular (<https://womenforafghanwomen.org/afghanistan/> [Accessed on 1 August]).

#### **4.2.3. EUPOL**

In the framework of its comprehensive approach towards Afghanistan, the Council decided to establish the EU police mission in Afghanistan EUPOL, launched in mid-June 2007. EUPOL had focused on many objectives in Afghanistan one of them was gender equality and Human Rights Standards- to priorities awareness and adherence to international human rights standards throughout policing and justice system. EUPOL also focuses on the development of the ANP capacity to respond to gender-based violence and to advance women 's participation in policing

throughout Afghanistan. It is worth noting that the European Union has played an active role in this area. By raising women's awareness and training programs for women, they have been able to raise their awareness. After graduating from these programs, women improved their competences and skills in their fields of work ([https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15\\_07/SR\\_EUPOL\\_AFGHANISTAN\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_07/SR_EUPOL_AFGHANISTAN_EN.pdf) [Accessed on 20 July 2021]).

In addition to building women's capacity in the police force, the organization has also encouraged women and girls to join the army and the ANP. As a result of the efforts of this organization, the number of female police officers had increased throughout the country. And crime rates dropped, and women had access to female police in the country to report crimes and domestic violence. ([https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15\\_07/SR\\_EUPOL\\_AFGHANISTAN\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_07/SR_EUPOL_AFGHANISTAN_EN.pdf) [Accessed on 20 July 2021]).

#### **4.2.4. GIZ**

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has supported Afghanistan's reconstruction since 2002. They opened their office in Kabul in 2002. Together with other international organizations, GIZ is supporting civil reconstruction in the country. Germany's main area of responsibility lies in the northern provinces ([https://www.giz.de/en/html/media\\_centre.html](https://www.giz.de/en/html/media_centre.html) [Accessed on 15 March 2021]).

The success of the current reform efforts of the country depends on the creation of effective administrative structures and stable conditions for all segments of the people. Economic improvement, an efficient regional and national administrative framework, higher education standards, functional infrastructure and respect for human rights, especially the rights of women and girls, and the reduction of familial violence are key goals in Afghanistan. Only by addressing these issues can the barriers to development that have affected the country over the past two decades be overcome. However, civil reconstruction has become more difficult under the current security system in several Afghan provinces. Because many areas are under the control of the Taliban and no department can help and cooperate with the people of those areas (Burik, 2015).

In response to the country's diverse past and present problems, the German and Afghan governments agreed to focus on the following priority areas: good governance, sustainable economic development including education / technical / vocational education, urban

development and urban infrastructure including energy and water, other areas of cooperation including training, monitoring and evaluation, communication, Consolidation only projects commissioned by the Federal Department of State. Due to the current situation in the country and the withdrawal of foreign troops, the GIZ offices have reduced their assistance and cooperation, and the lack of security in the country will transfer all its domestic and foreign staff from Afghanistan by the end of 2021. (Burik, 2015)

#### **4.2.5. Other complementary EU initiatives in Afghanistan**

From 2001 to 2021, the European Union has made great efforts to establish peace and security and an equal society. This support and coordination have reached the poor people of Afghanistan, directly or indirectly, through dozens of national and international organizations.

In addition to the institutions and organizations mentioned above, the EU has also supported other, mostly smaller organizations that have carried out their activities under the influence of a large organizations with their assistance. For example, NAWA, Afghan Bureau for Reconstruction- ABR, European network of NGOs in Afghanistan and The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan... These supports have been in the areas of peace, security, equality of labor, human rights, respect for the rights of the child, the establishment of schools and universities, and coordination with government departments. negotiations ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism_en) [Accessed on 14 April]).

It should be noted that in 2019, another initiative started operating under the name EU Afghanistan Peace Support Mechanism 2 (EU APSM), with the aim of contributing to strengthening the peace and security in the country. “The mechanism has the following key areas of intervention:

Confidence-building measures: EU APSM supports initiatives at local and national level that aim to enhance trust within the Afghan population across the country and in neighboring countries, overcome divisions and conflicts, build consensus around issues of peace, and deal with grievances. Connecting Afghan stakeholders: EU APSM supports initiatives that aim to connect stakeholder groups, from governmental agencies and/or civil society, through facilitating sustainable formats of consultation, dialogue and communication, and enabling the peace actors across Afghanistan to participate in all levels of the process - from grassroots to

high level political negotiations ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism_en) [Accessed on 14 April]).

Peace education: EU APSM supports initiatives that aim to develop a culture of peace and bring awareness about peace related issues, through peace campaigns, media programs, support to cultural activities or similar issues negotiations ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism_en) [Accessed on 14 April]).

Technical, thematic and logistical support to peace efforts: EU APSM has the capacity to provide technical and thematic support, capacity building as well as limited logistical support to ad-hoc meetings, events or other activities to facilitate encounters between various Afghan stakeholders. EU APSM gives priority to initiatives that put broad inclusivity as the main focus.” negotiations ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/afghanistan/67977/eu-afghanistan-peace-support-mechanism_en) [Accessed on 14 April]).

### **4.3. Challenges of international donor coordination for supporting women rights in Afghanistan**

Nowadays, women in developing countries especially Afghanistan, in addition to the violence and discrimination they have been struggling with for centuries, with the spread of civil war, the growth of terrorist and extremist groups, face new problems that concern the international community (Tripathi et al, 2017).

Despite the growing trend of meetings, the adoption of numerous documents and resolutions, and the adoption of international oversight measures and mechanisms within the framework of the United Nations and independent human rights organizations, reports of violations of women's rights around the world are shocking. This is especially the case in traditional societies, such as most Middle Eastern countries, where violence and discrimination have been passed down from generation to generation in the form of behavioral teachings and patterns of socialization, and developments and the production of contemporary ideas cannot easily influence norms. It is thought-provoking to leave it and transform it. Transformation of international instruments with a supportive attitude, we are towards the adoption of documents that aim to amend the laws in favor of achieving equality and eliminating all kinds of gender discrimination against women (Tripathi et al, 2017).



In the field of humanitarian law, especially given the trend of hostile governments in recent decades to use various forms of sexual violence against women as a military tactic, it has necessitated reforms and actions within the current structures of international peace and security with special support. The UN Security Council should take action to promote women's participation in the conflict (Tripathi et al, 2017).

#### **4.4. Uncertainty about women's rights in the near future**

Afghan women and girls are breaking down barriers and inspiring others to progress. Most of the time, they take courageous steps at great personal risk and demand lasting and just peace in the country. Afghan women despite all the difficulties they face, are always striving for progress and development in the country. Over the past 20 years, these women have been the driving force behind many of Afghanistan's development achievements — from health and education to gender equality, agriculture, and economic growth. Afghanistan's economic growth depends on the participation of women to help them use their skills and leadership in all areas of society, including government, business, and society (Watkins, Timor, 2018).

The European Union, the Government of Afghanistan and the United States of America have provided substantial support to strengthen gender equality and empowerment of Afghan women during past 20 years. Afghan women and girls have recently been embroiled in civil war, and Afghanistan is once again in a period of terror. And the future of Afghan women and girls has been bleak. Many women have lost their jobs, and many are under threat (Watkins, Timor, 2018).

These days, women are more concerned about their future and trying to survive, themselves and their families. Because with the intensification of the wars and the attacks of the enemy, the governmental and non-governmental departments have stopped their activities and they are waiting for peace in the country. Since the beginning of 2021, the Taliban have launched series of attacks in Afghanistan's small and large districts. Recently, with the capture of major Afghan cities such as Herat, Kandahar, Mazar and the Afghan capital, Kabul, it has raised concerns among the Afghan people. Men and women are worried about their future. Neighboring countries have closed their borders, and the men and women who worked in government and in international and national organizations are in danger and have no hope for their future. Many citizens of the country are trying to leave the country. And many have taken refuge in other people's homes to save their lives and their families (Watkins, Timor, 2018).

The Taliban are trying to declare it in their current government. To deprive Afghan women and girls of their human rights once again. With the establishment of the government of the Islamic Emirate and Sharia law, women are expected to be deprived of their fundamental rights in society. Some authors have been already pointing out that the international community risks of pushing women's rights back to the period 20 years ago by signing a memorandum of understanding with the Taliban. In case of Taliban's retake of power, once again, women will enter the dark ages in Afghanistan, while the rest of the world will be facing another wave of illegal immigration and results of the oppression of the Taliban in Afghanistan will again receive global media coverage (Watkins, Timor, 2018).

#### **5. Main factors influencing the effectiveness of the EU support to gender equality and women rights**

Donor advocacy for women's rights in Afghanistan has been a major achievement since 2001, particularly in the areas of access to education, health care, formal employment and political participation, as well as movements to protect women from domestic violence and abuse. However, there are allegations that aid programs have failed to address deep-rooted issues and have helped to keep women's movements in Afghanistan only within the reach of NGOs (Tripathi et al, 2017).

Donors, various Western organizations, Afghan activists and their allies often failed to recognize that foreign aid could never replace domestic political organizations. Afghan women can only achieve long-term gender equality if they become a nationally recognized political force, either as a factor in elections or in other forms. Until women are equal and recognized in Afghanistan's domestic politics, this international cooperation will be short-lived because women have never been given a high status in Afghanistan (Tripathi et al, 2017).

The assistance of the European Union and the international community in strengthening women's rights and equalizing women's rights in Afghanistan has been useful to some extent, but with the withdrawal of foreign forces, this assistance has been cut off and Afghan women's social activities may be overthrown. In such a critical year that Afghanistan is in transition, it is vital that the budgets of institutions and organizations are not cut, because these organizations, in proportion to government organizations, have more activity and attract more people. (Tripathi et al, 2017)

### **5.1. Complexity of environment for the EU's involvement in Afghanistan**

The European Union has been working for years in Afghanistan on gender equality and women's empowerment. These activities have not been without challenges for the EU. Afghanistan has been a traditional society where the men of this land have been in power for many years. A very small percentage of society has called for gender equality for women, and a large number still hold power for men. Especially in remote provinces and insecure districts where women are still traded at home as an object (Kandiyoti,2005).

The challenges that the European Union has faced in Afghanistan in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment are traditional society; insufficient literacy; lack of safety; lack of confidence in women; Taliban attacks; Lack of sufficient support from government departments; Ambiguous planning of the European Union and the international community with the government of Afghanistan (Kandiyoti,2005).

These have all been major challenges for the EU's efforts to implement gender equality and empowerment programs for women in Afghanistan. That has led to the non-implementation of programs and continuation of the life of Afghan women in violence and gender inequality (Kandiyoti,2005).

### **5.2. Lack of donor coordination**

Lack of coordination between international donors is another problem in Afghanistan. This inconsistency has led to the failure of some programs in the field of Afghan women's empowerment and gender equality. Because the organizations are not in contact with each other, and each organization has used a specific work plan and budget. As a result, the assistance has reached those who did not deserve it and the deserving ones have been deprived of it. This situation is primarily caused by the failure of adequate donor planning (Stockli,2014).

Therefore, donors in Afghanistan must work based on a proper work plan. As the Taliban are advancing every day and occupying most of the districts and provinces in Afghanistan, the lack of security in remote provinces continues to cause donors' inactivity in those areas. Despite the efforts of the Afghan government to bring security to the country, the results of these efforts remain vague. (Stockli,2014).

Another problem is that many countries are reluctant to donate due to lack of awareness of the current situation in Afghanistan. They refuse to cooperate with the Afghan government due to lack of credibility (Stockli,2014).

### **5.3. Lack of capacities of government institutions**

Lack of capacity of government institutions has become another reason for gender inequalities and lack of promotion of women in Afghanistan. Increasing women's participation in government institutions has been one of the commitments of the Afghan government. Insecurity, society's negative attitude towards women's employment outside the home, problems in the recruitment process and lack of capacity have been cited as challenges that hinder women's participation in governmental and non-governmental offices (Tripathi et al, 2017).

This problem is less common in the capital Kabul and a number of other large cities in Afghanistan, and more so in many provinces, that even the heads of the women's section of the government are run by men. This shows the weakness of government institutions. Sexual harassment has been cited as another factor preventing women from working in government and non-government offices. Because the office space is not safe for women and girls, and they have been illegitimately requested in government and non-government offices (Tripathi et al, 2017).

As pointed out in recent BBC news reports, “the head of the Administrative Reform Commission says that half of the walls or gates of offices should be made of glass and inside the offices should be seen and cameras should be installed to record the behavior of employees. Rola Ghani, Afghanistan's first lady, who was involved in drafting the policy, said that in addition to this, a policy to prevent harassment of women should be seriously pursued in the executive branch.” (<https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-42637338> [Accessed on 13 August 2021]).

The European Union has donated millions of dollars annually to women's capacity building in these offices, which today has led to little progress for women working in government and non-government offices ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/afghanistan_en) [Accessed on 12 August 2021]).

#### **5.4. Lack of capacities of local civil society organizations**

With much effort by the government and the European Union, the only major sector that did not grow was the local civil society organizations. These organizations made countless efforts with small budgets and launching small and large plans in the country, but unfortunately Afghan families not only cooperated but also tried to close these organizations by the Afghan government. Families have barred their daughters and wives from joining the organizations, which have been terminating their civil society, human rights and women's rights advocacy activities over time (Tripathi et al, 2017).

The perception of local population is that the local civil society organizations are the source of corruption and shamelessness in the country. To some extent, the activities of these local civil society organizations are commendable because they have carried out their activities throughout Afghanistan with little money and with countless problems. Although they had less budget and support, their efforts to build gender equality and empower women were significant (Tripathi et al, 2017).

#### **5.5. Security challenges**

It has been increasingly clear that the agenda of the terrorist groups and their supporters has been to carry out terrorist attacks and spread insecurity in Afghanistan in the coming years. The Taliban's ignoring of the Afghan government's peace plan makes it clear that their main focus is to start the war in Afghanistan. In addition, developments in the region and international issues, such as the US withdrawal from the Burjam program with Iran and the defeat of ISIS in the Middle East, have also had a significant impact on increasing insecurity in Afghanistan. (Kandiyoti, 2005).

Civilian casualties and security forces, clashes in some districts and areas between security forces and armed opposition, suicide and group attacks, explosions, kidnappings, and hostage-taking, how to lead the security forces and the issue of their equipment and facilities. These are the issues that are most discussed today. Today, national and international institutions have reduced their activities due to the insecurity in the country. Because they lost most of their employees in the district and insecure areas. This has closed their offices in districts and areas that were insecure (Kandiyoti, 2005).

## **5.6. Corruption**

As already mentioned, the corruption has been one of the main risks and challenges for the effectiveness of various EU's supported reforms in various sectors of development, especially in the women's sector, where the invested international assistance has been substantial (Dash, 2015).

The corruption has affected the education, health, military, police, government and non-government sectors, and has significantly tarnished the progress made in those areas. With the new commitments that helped Afghanistan, many authors point out that the country must refocus on its call to fight corruption. Otherwise, the donations risk to be wasted again. The corruption has been the source of failure and the loss of global aid in Afghanistan. Many donors have lost confidence in the Afghan government, and the international development assistance budget has been shrinking every year (Dash, 2015).

In short, the lack of security has led to corruption in the development of Afghan society. People misuse the current situation in the country and lead the country to crisis. Government offices in Afghanistan are generally perceived to be mired in corruption. It is a common understanding that a person cannot be appointed in any government office without giving money or getting acquainted with politicians. (Dash, 2015).

The failure of international donors to find adequate tools of fighting corruption and preventing the misuse of the donors' funds in the country has been one of the major factors influencing the effectiveness of the EU's investments in Afghanistan.

## **6. Conclusion**

The issue of the EU's effectiveness in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan is a hot and controversial topic that will be attracting attention for a number of years. The European Union has been firmly committed to bring peace to Afghanistan and to enable Afghan women to play an active role in political and social activities. However, the comprehensive assessment of the EU's success in that area cannot be properly done within the limited scope of this thesis.

This thesis sought to analyze the main characteristics of the EU's assistance to promoting women rights in Afghanistan and explore the factors which influence the effectiveness of the EU's support to the gender equality and women empowerment in the country.

Afghan women have been involved in numerous community-based activities in collaboration with European organizations. EU organizations have also played an active role in gender equality and the empowerment of women in civilian and military administrations. Today, thousands of women work in civilian and military offices alongside men. This is part of the effectiveness of EU cooperation in women's empowerment and gender equality.

Gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan has always been a difficult task. Traditional, patriarchal society and the lack of access to education have caused many problems in society. The Afghan men have generally considered power as their paternal heritage and have deprived women of their rights and imposed numerous disempowering beliefs among women. The fear of their lives, insecurity and corruption in society have also contributed to the situation in which only a small percentage of women are engaged in political and social activities.

The European Union has played an active role in empowering women by donating thousands of millions of euros annually, with large investments, enabling Afghan women to work outside the home. Despite many challenges, the EU investments in promoting women's gender equality and empowerment have not been in vain.

Overall, the EU has had a significant impact on the access of women to education, health, job creation, employment opportunities, but also in promoting women's role in bringing peace and security in the country.

This thesis has demonstrated that the major factors undermining the effectiveness of the EU's support to Afghanistan have been the corruption, the lack of capacities of government bodies,

the insufficient capacities of local civil society organizations, lack of donor coordination, as well as security threats. Due to these challenges, EU's assistance has been only partially effective.

This thesis has been finalized right before the Taliban's retake of the power in Afghanistan which has been the biggest threat for all the EU's supported achievements in the area of protection of women rights and empowerment of women for active participation in social and political life. A more advanced evaluation of the EU's interventions in Afghanistan in past two decade would be needed to draw necessary lessons learned and create a basis for more effective interventions of the EU and other donors in this field in the future.



## 7. Summary and key words

Over the past 20 years, due to the efforts of the European Union and other donors, there has been an undeniable progress in the field of women's rights in Afghan society. The National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan 2008-2020 and most recently the National Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women have been developed with the aim of improving the situation of Afghan women and ensuring gender equality with several support programs. Some of the international aid organizations in this area promote the largest women's empowerment programs in Afghanistan since the establishment of USAID, GIZ / Role of Law, UN, UNICEF.

The focus of this research is on the effectiveness of the EU's assistance to gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan. The purpose of the research is to contribute to better understanding of the EU's presence and support in a very complex environment with a number of challenges in the field of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms. The main research questions are: What are the main characteristics of the EU's assistance to promoting women rights in Afghanistan? What factors influence the effectiveness of the EU's support to the gender equality and women empowerment in Afghanistan? It is claimed that due to the complexity of the environment and many difficult security, cultural and other challenges, the EU's assistance has been only partially effective. The methodology of the research will rely on the qualitative analysis of the extensive secondary literature, official EU publications, studies of international organizations, independent CSOs and think-tanks, as well as various scientific articles.

This thesis has demonstrated that the major factors undermining the effectiveness of the EU's support to Afghanistan have been the corruption, the lack of capacities of government bodies, the insufficient capacities of local civil society organizations, lack of donor coordination, as well as security threats. Due to these challenges, EU's assistance has been only partially effective.

**Key words:** European Union, women empowerment, gender equality, women rights, Afghanistan.

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