

# Women and the media in Afghanistan:

## How to support female media workers in a challenging landscape



## Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

DFA	de facto authorities (the Taliban)
FGD	focus group discussion
KII	key informant interview
MDM	mis-, dis- and mal-information
PVPV	Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (2024 law)
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
VOA	Voice of America

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## Executive summary

**“ Media is crucial, especially in our community where we aren’t allowed outside. We get all the information through media. ”**

*Female focus group discussion participant, Kandahar*

**“ My interest in journalism drives me to overcome all restrictions and keep working, as well as to lift the voices of people, especially women. ”**

*Female media worker, Takhar*

### Background context

Since August 2021 when the Taliban (referred to in this report as the de facto authorities or the DFA) returned to power, they have issued decrees that restrict women’s movement, education and work.

Unsurprisingly, the media landscape in Afghanistan has undergone significant changes since then, with huge implications for both female audiences and female media workers. According to a 2023 survey conducted by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Afghan Independent Journalists Association, there are no longer any female journalists in 11 provinces of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

The DFA decrees require women journalists to wear Islamic hijabs (headscarves) and work in a separate newsroom, and they are prohibited from conducting radio and TV programmes with male colleagues. Films and TV serials in which a female actress has played a role cannot be broadcasted.<sup>2</sup> Female journalists are also not allowed to participate in DFA press conferences.

The 2024 Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) law has further restricted female journalists’ ability to effectively contribute to media. According to this law, women’s faces must not be seen and their voices must not be heard in public, and images of living beings (including people) should not appear in the media (for full details, see footnote 3).

### About this report

This report highlights findings from mixed method research conducted by BBC Media Action in June and July 2024. It aims to help readers understand the evolving media landscape in Afghanistan, to inform strategies to support female media workers and meet female audience members’ needs.

Data was collected through a quantitative survey of 557 Afghan women (54%) and men (46%) from 10 provinces, and an online survey of 139 female media workers in 25 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. The qualitative research component comprised five focus group discussions (FGDs), three with women and two with men across five provinces, and key informant interviews (KIs) with 17 female media workers operating inside or outside Afghanistan.

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## Key findings

### Are female audiences' needs being met?

**Women in Afghanistan continue to have less access to information than men**, particularly through TV and the internet. **At least 33% of women (more in rural areas) rely on family as a key source of information**, while men prioritise other information sources. Yet Afghan women's information needs have never been more pronounced – due to restrictions on their activities, many are confined to their homes.

Women in Afghanistan with media access rely on this more than ever to keep updated on issues that concern them, and spend more time accessing and using media:

**“Now women are in the confines of their homes... The virtual space is the only window for us to learn about what is happening.”**

*Female FGD participant, Herat*

**Two-thirds (65%) of female survey respondents say that the media is “very important” in their daily lives, compared with half (51%) of male respondents.** Despite various efforts to cater to female audiences, 67% of female and male respondents feel that Afghan media only “somewhat” or “rarely” meets women’s needs.

Reflecting restrictions on media content, respondents complain that domestic media contains too much religious content and not enough entertainment.<sup>3</sup> However, educational content is still allowed, providing women and girls who are denied access to schooling with a vital source of education.

**Respondents are more satisfied with the balance of content in international media and media run by Afghans in exile**, and they are more likely to watch some types of entertainment, such as movies, on international than domestic TV.

However, a number of international media outlets are inaccessible from Afghanistan. Journalists inside Afghanistan are banned from working with international TV/radio channels or news sites, and some have been arrested for doing so.<sup>4</sup>

### Women's media visibility and roles

87% of respondents say the presence of women in the media in Afghanistan has decreased since August 2021. Only 41% could name a female presenter or journalist. Almost all of those named by respondents worked in the media before 2021, or currently work from outside Afghanistan. Audience members support women featuring in news and educational programmes but are less supportive of them featuring in comedy and sports content.

**Over half (54%) of the general survey respondents say they would support a female relative to work as a journalist.** A further 12% would support a female relative under certain conditions, including wearing the hijab and travelling with a *mahram* (women cannot leave their home without a male chaperone).

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**Women-led media working from outside Afghanistan (in exile) focus on important women's issues that cannot be covered inside Afghanistan**, such as menstruation, gender-based violence and the impact of restrictive policies. However, these media outlets have limited impact for two main reasons. Firstly, they face challenges in accessing information sources inside Afghanistan. Secondly, their content is mainly written and shared online, so is not accessible to women who cannot read and those without internet access.

**Female vloggers are popular** – 41% of all respondents who access the internet follow a female YouTuber (46% of men and 36% of women). Despite these vloggers producing a variety of content, only 26% of the overall population (and 58% of those who follow them) find this content relevant. Vloggers also face challenges such as DFA harassment and people hesitating to engage with them because of fears associated with the DFA.

### **Challenges faced by women working in the media**

While 89% of survey respondents agree that women should work in the media sector, **female media workers report negative attitudes towards them from people in their communities**, particularly in some regions:

**“I am the only female journalist here and most people have negative views and discriminatory behaviour towards female journalists.”**

*Female journalist*<sup>5</sup>

Community members also fear the consequences of being interviewed by female journalists, hampering their work.

Female media workers face many **workplace challenges due to gender segregation rules** that often mean women work from home or in extreme cases are let go from their jobs. These restrictions can lead to women in media being undervalued and mistreated by their employers – female media workers mention that delayed or unpaid salaries disproportionately affect female employees.

The **restrictions** on featuring women's voices and faces introduced in August 2024,<sup>6</sup> along with the ban on mixed-gender presenting teams and the *mahram* requirement that were already in place before that, **have limited female journalists' ability to contribute to media effectively**.

Some women journalists say the DFA has prevented them from entering their workplace. Women have to be extra cautious when making programmes, for example female presenters cannot take calls from men while on air and cannot laugh on air.

**Female journalists are also routinely denied access to information**, prevented from interviewing authorities and attending press conferences. Many have been contacted or visited by the authorities, or even arrested. This climate of fear and uncertainty has resulted in self-censorship for many women media professionals.

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The PVPV law was announced after conducting the research for this report. To understand its impact on female media workers, BBC Media Action conducted an additional seven interviews and an FGD with women media practitioners. These women are extremely concerned about how this law will be enforced and whether their jobs will continue, but initially continued to work while exercising extreme caution.

The impact of having fewer women in the media has coincided with, and contributed towards, **a noticeable decline in Afghan media content that focuses on women's issues and perspectives**. There has also been a reduction in the diversity of viewpoints and stories featured in the media, meaning that audiences', including women's, information needs are not being met.

Research conducted in other countries shows that stories covered by women journalists generally include more female voices and are more likely to challenge gender stereotypes.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore key to support women in media as part of supporting gender equality and women's rights in Afghan society more widely.



Maimana city, Faryab province

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## Key recommendations

Meet the needs of female audiences by:

- Supporting both the media in Afghanistan and in exile to provide the information women need in formats that appeal to them through the platforms they can access and in permitted formats
- Producing diverse and inclusive content that reflects women's experiences and perspectives, including those of marginalised women, and that challenge negative perceptions relating to women

Support female media workers by:

- Enabling media workers in exile to produce content relating to women's issues that cannot be covered within Afghanistan
- Providing access to skills development, mentoring and training programmes tailored to their needs, including specific training for vloggers
- Creating and supporting existing safe spaces and initiatives through which they can share experiences, seek advice and get mental health support
- Promoting partnerships between exiled and in-country media workers to allow information sharing
- Enabling them to recognise and dispel mis-, dis- and mal-information (MDM)
- Providing grants to media organisations to employ and retain women employees
- Addressing gender-based discrimination in the workplace



Qala-i Naw, Badghis province

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## Introduction

Globally, women remain under-represented in the media as the subject of news stories, as expert voices, and as reporters, and issues concerning women such as gender-based violence receive very little airtime.

This marginalisation is exacerbated by intersecting identities – women from minority and historically marginalised groups, such as those with disabilities, face greater under-representation. The media also reinforces gender stereotypes through the types of programmes that represent women and in the roles that women play on air or on screen. For example, women are better represented in entertainment programmes than news programmes, and women often feature in stereotypical roles such as victim or mother.<sup>8</sup>

In low-income countries, women often lack access to information, particularly online given a widening gender divide in access to digital content.<sup>9</sup> This lack of access to information makes women more vulnerable to shocks and stresses such as natural disasters and macroeconomic shocks, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.<sup>10</sup>

Women are also under-represented in media organisations' workforces, and equality in the workplace has been shown to have a positive effect on media content as women journalists include more diverse sources and are more likely to challenge gender stereotypes in their programmes.<sup>11</sup> This highlights the importance of supporting women in media as part of wider efforts to support women's and girls' rights, and transform societal gender norms.

Since August 2021 when the Taliban (referred to in this report as the de facto authorities or DFA) returned to power in Afghanistan, the country's media landscape has undergone changes that have had a huge impact on female audience members and media workers.<sup>12</sup>

The DFA has severely curtailed the ability of these outlets to operate. There has been a significant decline in Afghan women's representation and participation in the media since 2021, with many women journalists forced to flee the country or cease working.<sup>13</sup>

International Media Support reported that the number of women journalists working in Afghanistan has decreased from 1,400 before August 2021 to 600 in 2024 (although this is higher than the low of 400 in 2023).<sup>14</sup> This drastic reduction in women's presence in the media sector has had a profound impact on the diversity and quality of information available to the public.<sup>15</sup> Women journalists who have continued working in Afghanistan face threats and security challenges.<sup>16</sup> DFA policies, such as segregating men and women in media workspaces and restricting women's appearances on screen, have further affected women's ability to do their jobs effectively.<sup>17</sup>

The DFA's crackdown on media freedom and content have also had a disproportionate impact on women, as Afghan media struggles to report on issues affecting women, such as the policies that restrict their freedom of speech and movement.<sup>18</sup> Policies such as restricting women's on-screen appearances and excluding them from press conferences have severely limited women's ability to access and shape media narratives.<sup>19</sup> And the ban on music and

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other content deemed to be inappropriate and unIslamic has a disproportionate impact on female audiences and young people, who prefer to consume diverse entertainment content alongside news.<sup>20</sup>

This report outlines key findings and recommendations arising from BBC Media Action research to build on existing knowledge and provide a comprehensive overview of the evolving media landscape for Afghan women. It aims to help inform strategies for media sector actors, practitioners and stakeholders, including donors, to support female media workers in Afghanistan and ensure that Afghan media meets the needs of female audience members.

These findings build on existing knowledge based on BBC Media Action's years of experience in delivering training and mentoring programmes to help local radio stations in Afghanistan meet their audiences' information needs.



Qala-i Naw, Badghis province

# Methodology

Research took place in June and July 2024, using a mixed method approach (see Table 1). BBC Media Action researchers conducted the in person and telephone interviews.

Table I: Research methodology

<b>Study participants</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>General Afghan population</b>	<b>Quantitative survey (community members from 10 provinces)</b>	557 (298 women and 259 men)	Understand the role of media in Afghans' daily lives, and Afghans' perceptions about women working in the media
	<b>Focus group discussions (FGDs)</b>  5 FGDs (3 with women and 2 with men) in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Balkh and Nangarhar provinces	30 (18 women and 12 men)	Gather in-depth information about the role of the media in Afghans' (particularly Afghan women's) daily lives, and its impact on the community's perception of women's participation in public life
<b>Female journalists and media workers</b>	<b>Key informant interviews (KIIs)</b>	17 KIIs with female media workers, content makers and vloggers both inside and outside Afghanistan	Gather in-depth information about the experiences and challenges faced by female media workers in Afghanistan
	<b>Online quantitative survey (female journalists and media workers from 25 provinces)</b>	139 women	Gather information about female journalists and media workers, their experiences since August 2021, and how they believe donors can provide support

Respondents to the general population and female media worker surveys are profiled in the figures 1 and 2, respectively.

Figure 1: Survey respondent profile – general population

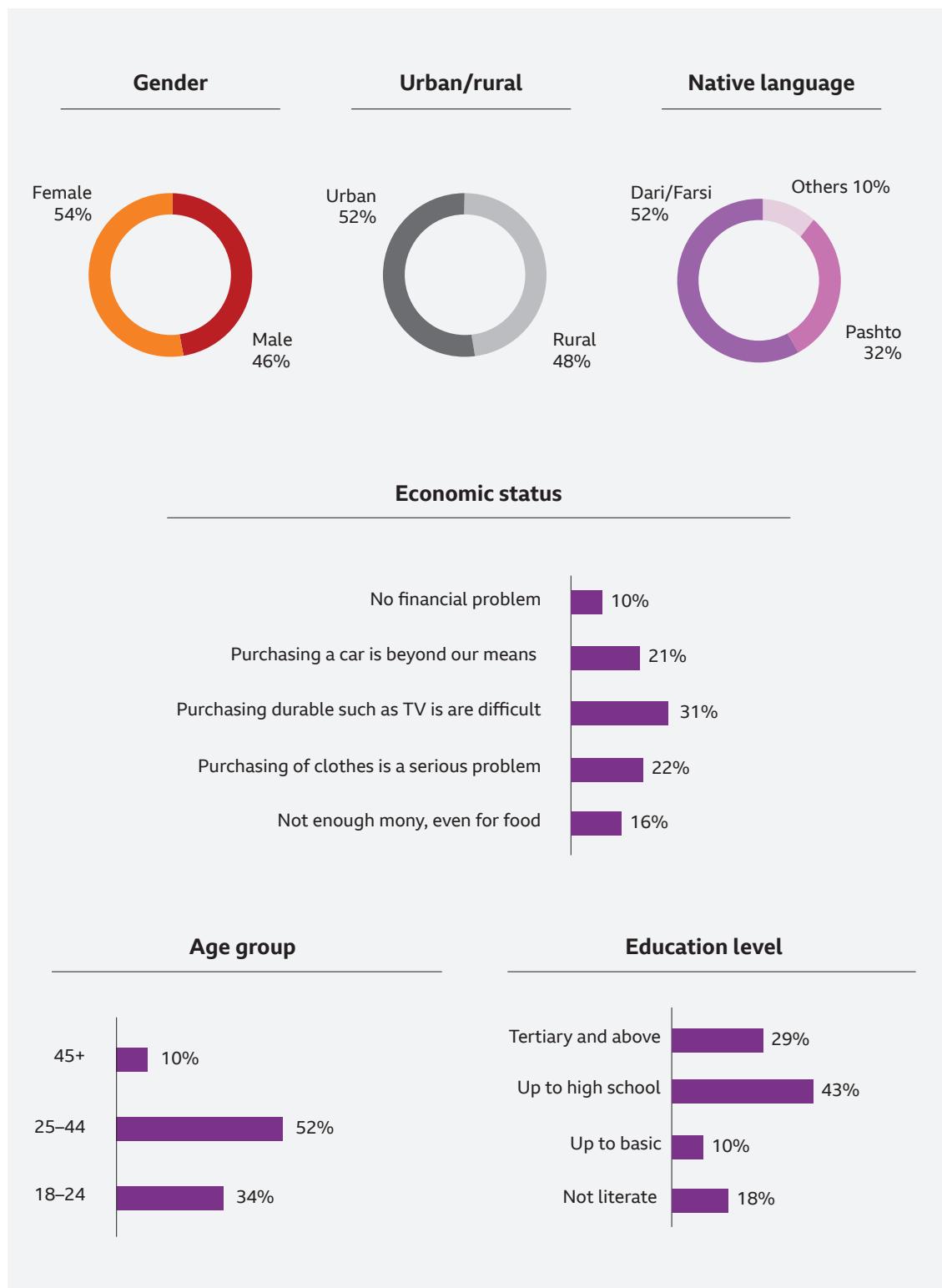
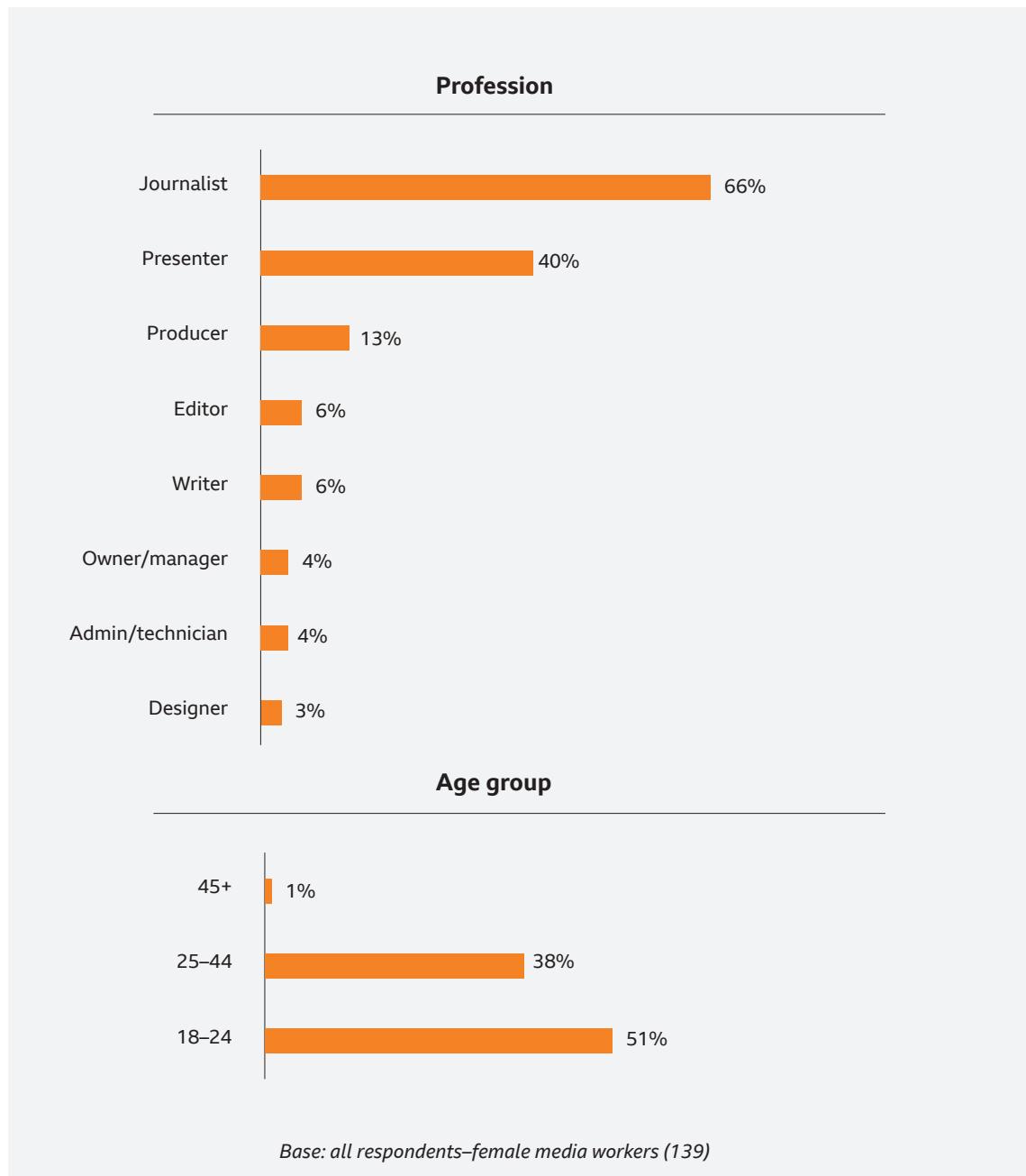


Figure 2: Survey respondent profile – female media workers



The DFA introduced the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) law (see footnote 3) after the research for this report was conducted so BBC Media Action carried out additional qualitative research with female media workers in its network to understand the impact of these laws. This involved interviewing seven female journalists and conducting one FGD with female journalists from different provinces in Kabul.

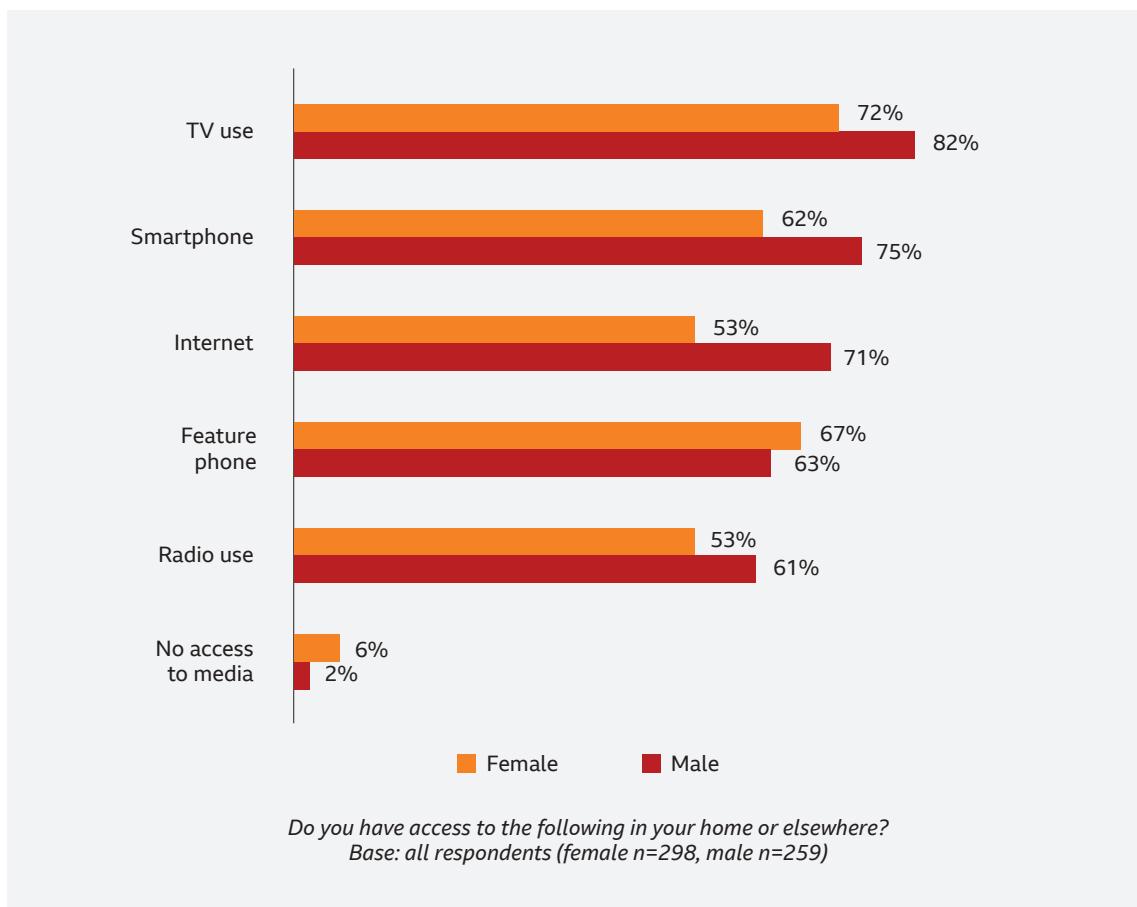
# Research findings

## Are audiences' information needs being met?

### Women have less media access than men, despite relying on it for information

As shown in Figure 3, men in Afghanistan have higher access to most media platforms than women, with the exception of feature phones (basic phones that can make and receive calls and texts, but not access the internet). Women are more likely to have feature phones than men, while men are more likely to have smartphones.

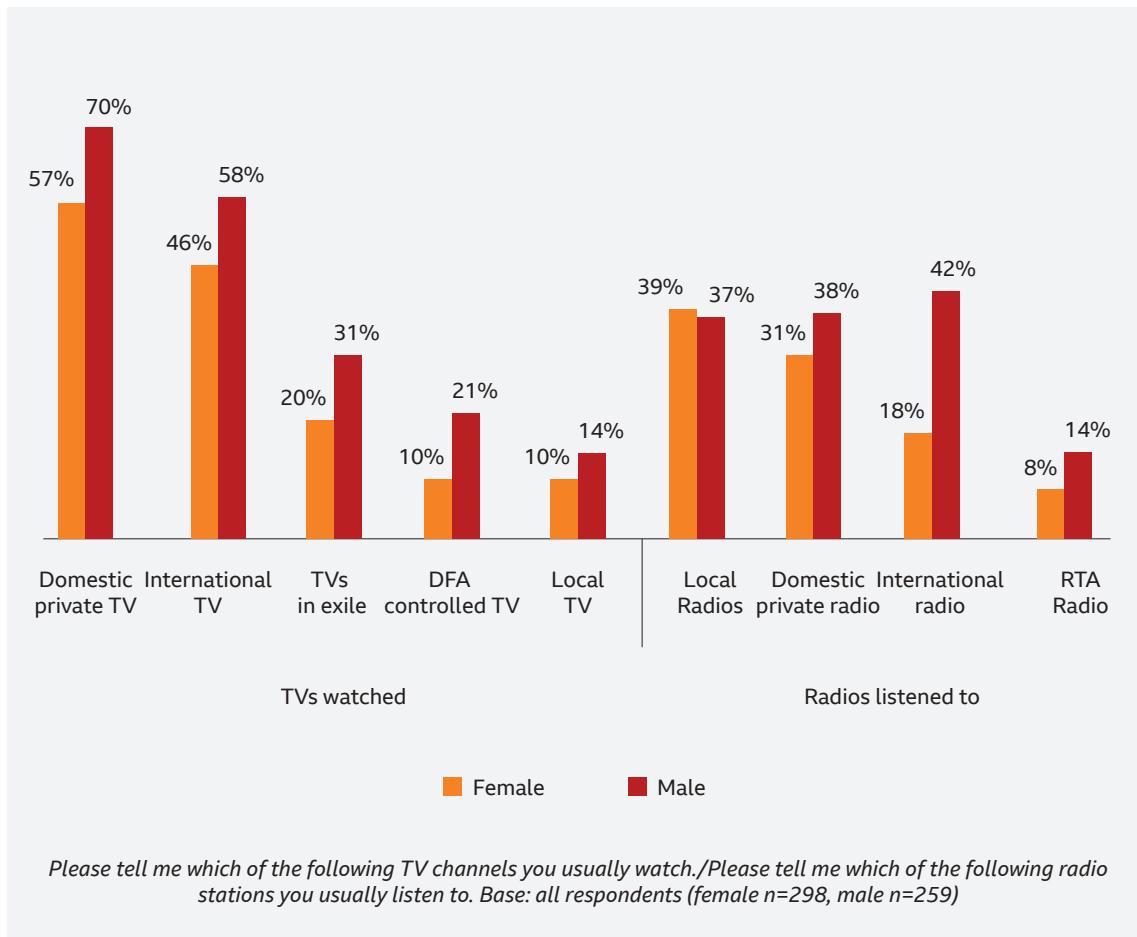
Figure 3: Media access, by gender



People in rural areas generally access radio more than those in urban areas, and a similar pattern is seen among women – women in rural areas are more likely to access radio than women in urban areas (61% versus 46%, respectively). In the overall sample, there are no other significant differences in media access between people in urban and rural areas. However, there is some variation in women's access to feature phones: 74% of women in urban areas have access to a feature phone compared with 60% of those in rural areas.

Men also use more diverse TV and radio channels than women (see Figure 4), with the only exception being local radio.

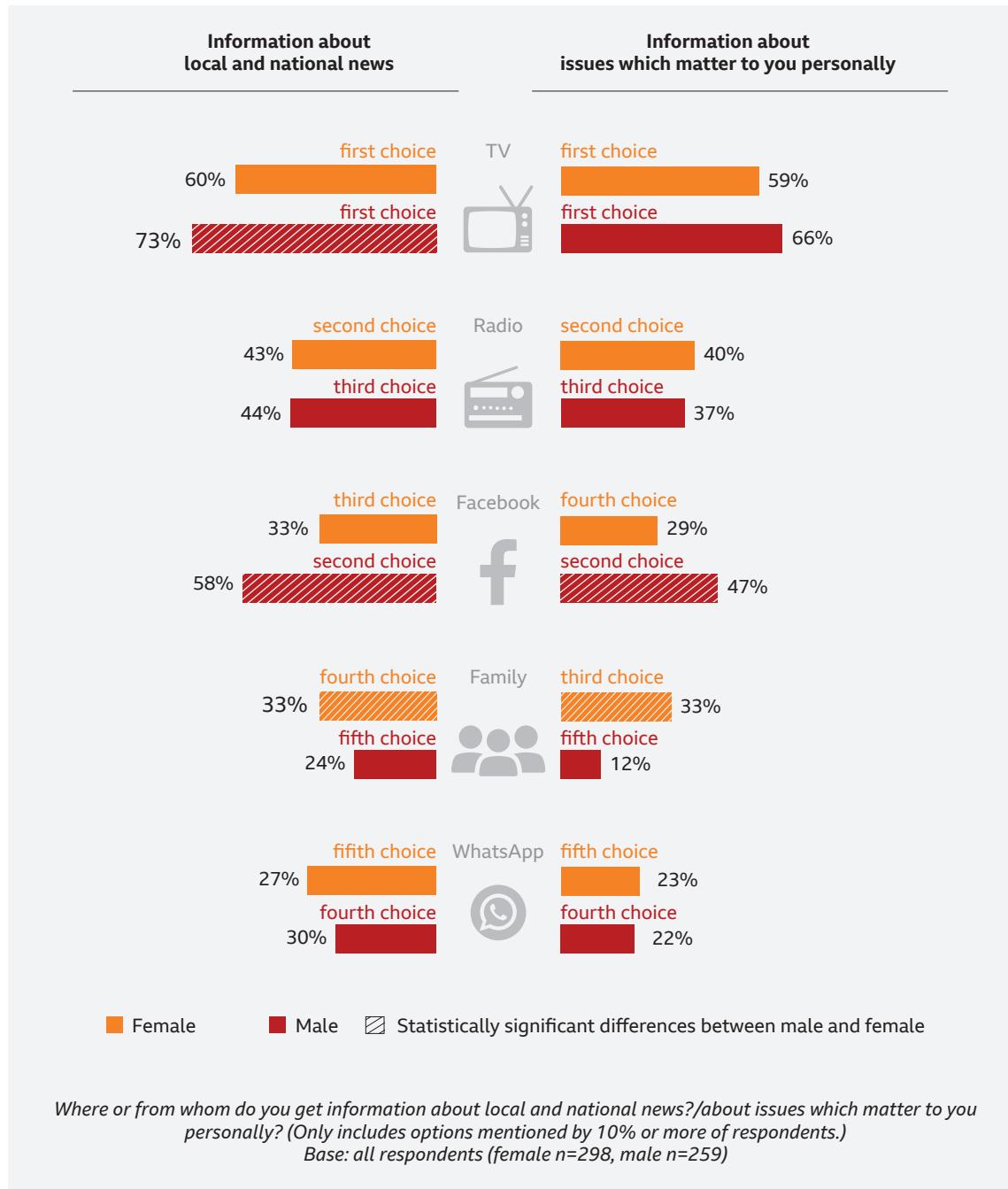
Figure 4: Types of TV channels and radio stations accessed, by gender



Previous BBC Media Action research found that while men mainly access media in the evenings, women do so in the daytime. Women's daytime media use has increased since 2021, likely because restrictions on them working and studying leave them unoccupied during the day.<sup>21</sup>

Limitations on women's movement, work and education mean they rely more on media as a source of information than before 2021,<sup>22</sup> but as women have less media access than men, this restricts their access to information. While TV, radio and Facebook are among the top information sources for both genders, family is also a key source of information for around one in three women, but it is less of a priority source for men.

Table 2: Respondents' information sources, by gender



Research participants also mention news being circulated through female-only social media spaces.

Female research participants talk about the importance of media for accessing news and important information:

“I listen to the radio to know about the news, but also for entertainment purposes.”

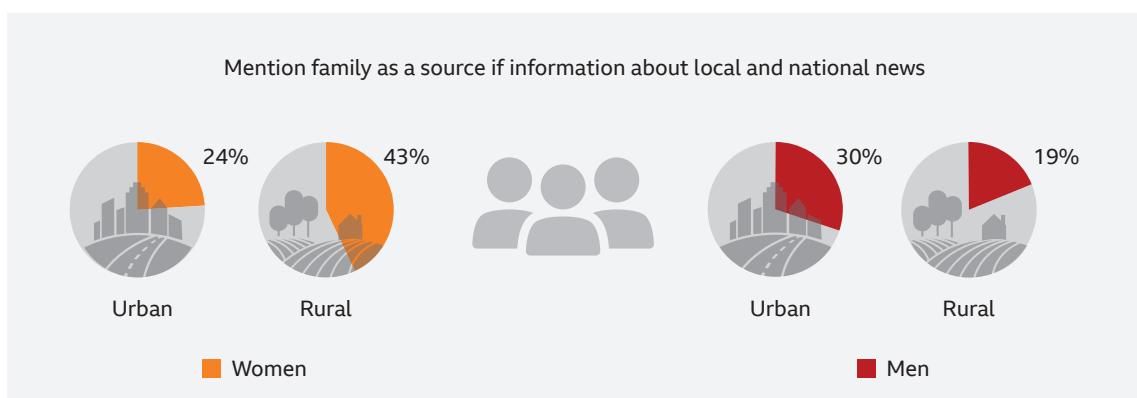
*Female FGD participant, Kandahar*

“I either listen to the radio or use my phone to access information because it has helped me get educated.”

*Female FGD participant, Kandahar*

Young people (aged 15–24), people in urban areas and those with higher levels of education and income are more likely to mention the internet as a source of information, likely due to having more online access.

Many of the most commonly used information sources differ for different types of women and men, showing the impact of intersecting identities. For example, only 24% of urban women mention family as a source of information about local or national news compared with 43% of those in rural areas, while urban men were more likely to mention family as an information source than those in rural areas (30% versus 19%, respectively).

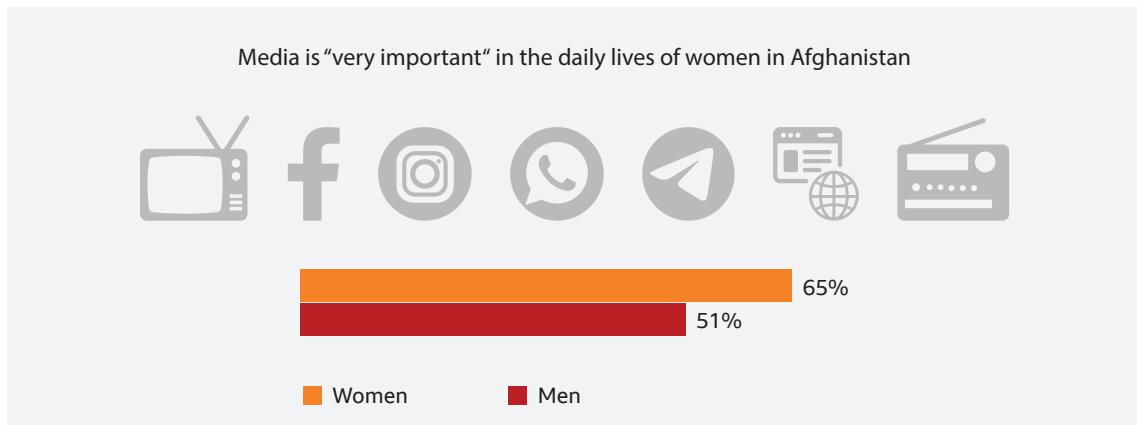


One-quarter (24%) of women with disabilities rely on relatives as a source of information about local and national news, compared with 13% of women without disabilities. For men there is no difference based on disability – 10% of men with disabilities and 10% of men without disabilities use relatives as an information source.<sup>23</sup>

Lack of access to information can lead to people being misinformed about news and current affairs. BBC Media Action research around mis-, dis- and mal-information (MDM)<sup>24</sup> has shown how women's lower levels of media access may be a factor in making them more vulnerable to MDM as they lack access to multiple sources to check information, and are more likely than men to rely on personal connections for information. The same research found that people with multiple media sources were found to be less likely to believe MDM.<sup>25</sup>

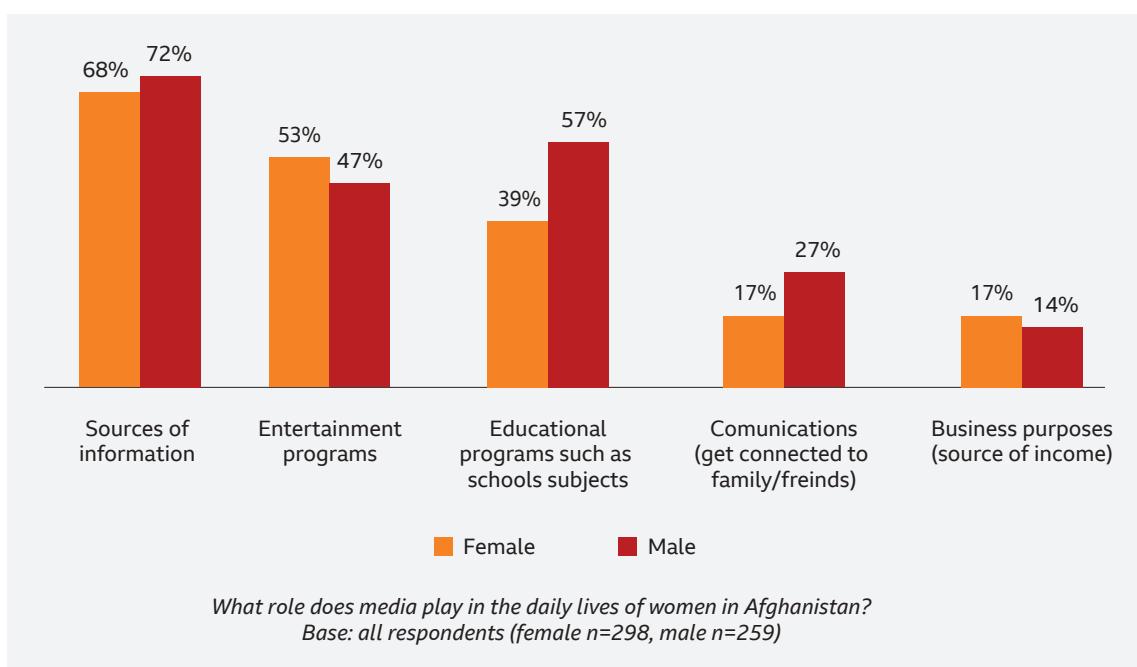
## Why is media important for women?

People in Afghanistan see media as very important in women's lives, and women place a higher importance on media than men: **65% of female survey respondents say that the media is “very important” in the daily lives of women in Afghanistan, compared with 51% of male respondents.** Young people aged 15–24 were more likely to say that the media plays an important role in the lives of women.



Women primarily see media as a source of information and entertainment, while men feel that media should inform and educate women, with entertainment a lesser priority (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Opinions about the role of media in women's lives, by gender



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Qualitative research participants mention how the media has become even more important as a source of information since women's movement, education and work have been restricted.<sup>26</sup>

**“ Now women are in the confines of their homes. The doors to schools and universities are shut in their faces. They are no longer allowed to work. The virtual space is the only window for us to learn about what is happening, what risks await us, and what ways there can be for our future. ”**

*Female FGD participant, Herat*

While the limitations on entertainment content affect women more than men, content on social issues around education, health and agriculture is still allowed in Afghanistan. Educational content can benefit women and girls who lack vital information and have been denied access to education.

**“ I have a daughter who is in seventh grade but now can't go to school. She follows an online learning programme called Begum. It is a good programme. ”**

*Female FGD participant, Herat*

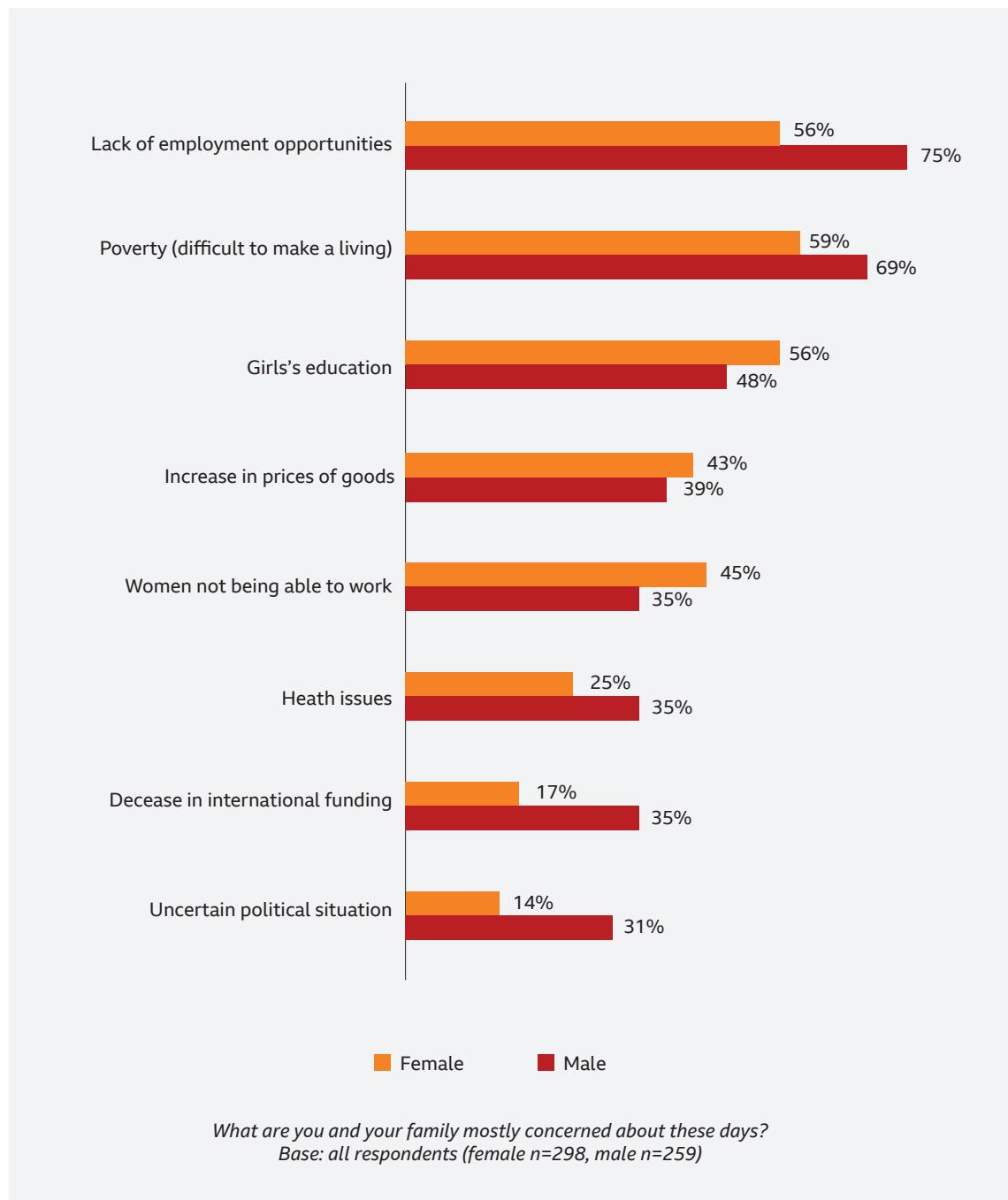


Kandahar city

## What issues should the media address for women?

When asked about the issues they and their family are most concerned about, **the majority of men and women mention lack of employment opportunities and poverty**, but otherwise women and men have different concerns (see Figure 6). Women highlight issues relating to women's and girls' freedom, such as girls' education and bans on women working, more often than men.

Figure 6: Key concerns, by gender



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Female qualitative research participants also highlight such concerns. Female media workers say that women are “wiped out” (erased) from public life, and women in the general population worried about the future for women and girls in Afghanistan:

“ The boundaries of what women can do [in Afghanistan] keeps closing in. ”

*Female journalist, Logar*

“ I have two daughters. I am worried about their future. ”

*Female FGD participant, Kandahar*

Women look to the media for information on the restrictions they face, particularly in relation to education and work (reflecting survey participants’ concerns shown in Figure 6).

“ I follow news and media to know about the recent decrees concerning women. ”

*Female FGD participant, Kandahar*

### Media content that women find engaging

**Bans on music and entertainment content in Afghanistan have hit women and young people aged 15-24 hardest.** Previous BBC Media Action research shows that while men and women both prioritise news content over other formats, women are more likely than men to seek out diverse entertainment content such as drama, music, comedy, and movies.<sup>27</sup>

The 2024 survey shows a slightly different picture (see Figure 7). While news is still among the most important media content for both genders, it is more of a priority for men than women. Men are also more likely to seek out talk shows and sports while women are more likely to prefer educational and music content. Men and women give equal preference to comedy and movies – although both genders are more likely to seek out movies on international than domestic TV.

Figure 7: Content formats watched on domestic TV, by gender

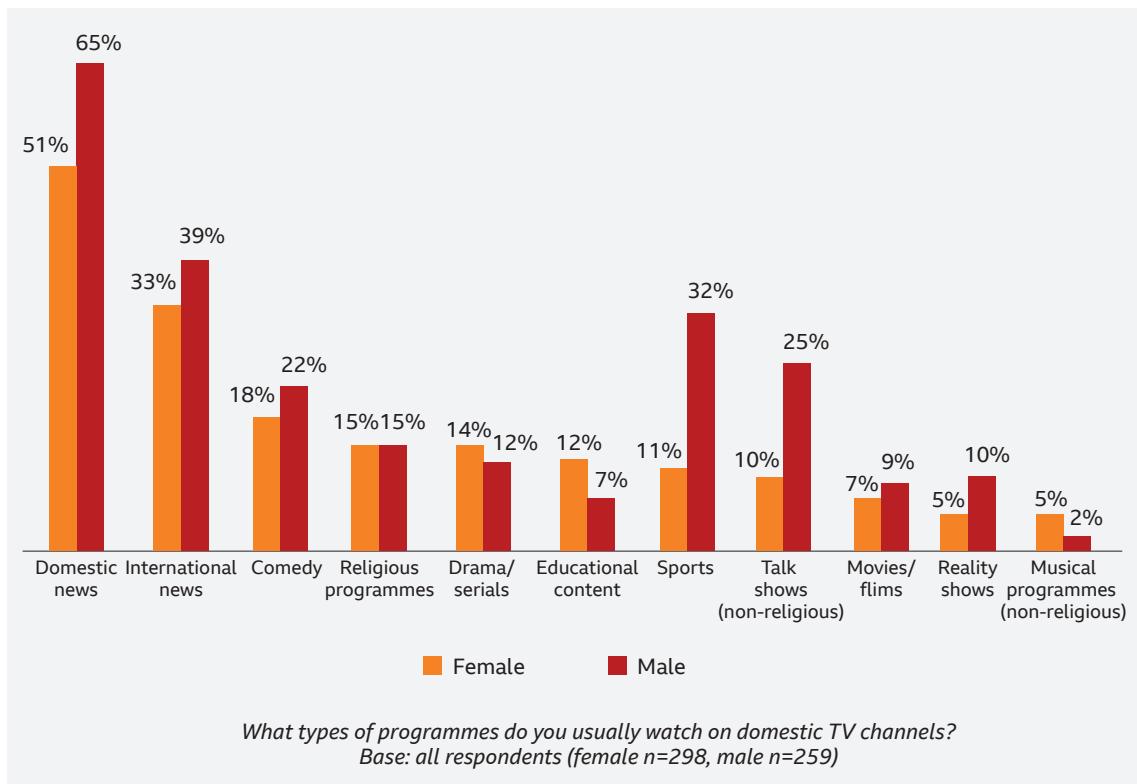
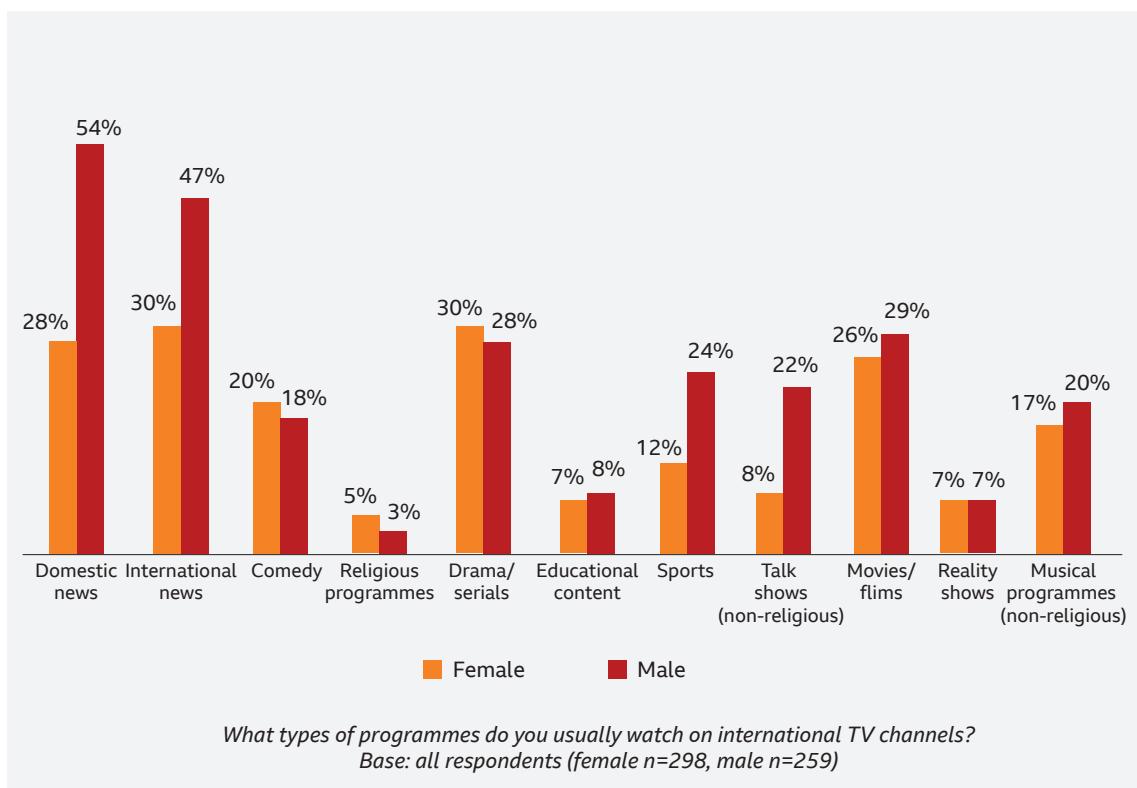


Figure 8: Content formats watched on international TV, by gender



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It is possible that this shift in women's preferences is because of the lack of availability of certain types of media in Afghanistan. Films and TV serials featuring female actors, foreign films considered against the principles of Sharia and Afghan values, and comedy and entertainment programmes that "insult people" cannot be broadcasted in the country.<sup>28</sup> Survey responses from this study show that most people find that there is too much religious content and not enough entertainment content on domestic TV (see Figure 9).

Participants in the qualitative research mention that domestic media content is mainly religion and news. Female media workers say that media organisations inside Afghanistan avoid focusing on women's issues or entertainment due to DFA rules:

**“In [this province], media cannot publish entertainment programmes or shows involving a lot of laughter. These are not allowed. ”**

*Female journalist in one of the provinces*

**Survey respondents were more satisfied with the coverage on international media** see Figure 9). However, international media output is also hindered by the DFA. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the DFA jammed Afghanistan International broadcasts in Kabul.<sup>29</sup> Two international radio channels – Voice of America (VOA) and Azadi Radio – are not accessible on FM inside Afghanistan,<sup>30</sup> and the news sites Hashte Sobh and Etilaat-e Roz are inaccessible in Afghanistan. Journalists inside Afghanistan are banned from working with international TV/radio channels or news sites, and some have been arrested for doing so.<sup>31</sup>



Maimana city, Faryab province

Figure 9: Views on the amount of TV and radio coverage on key topics, media inside Afghanistan

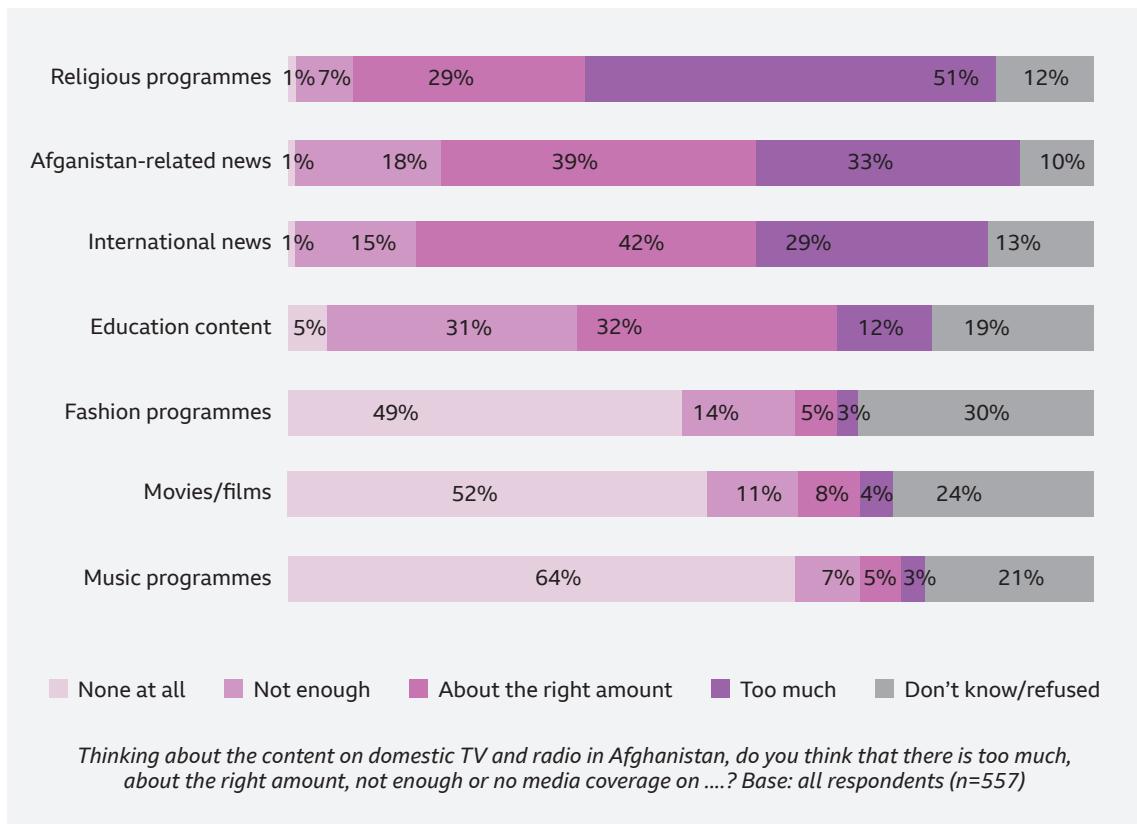
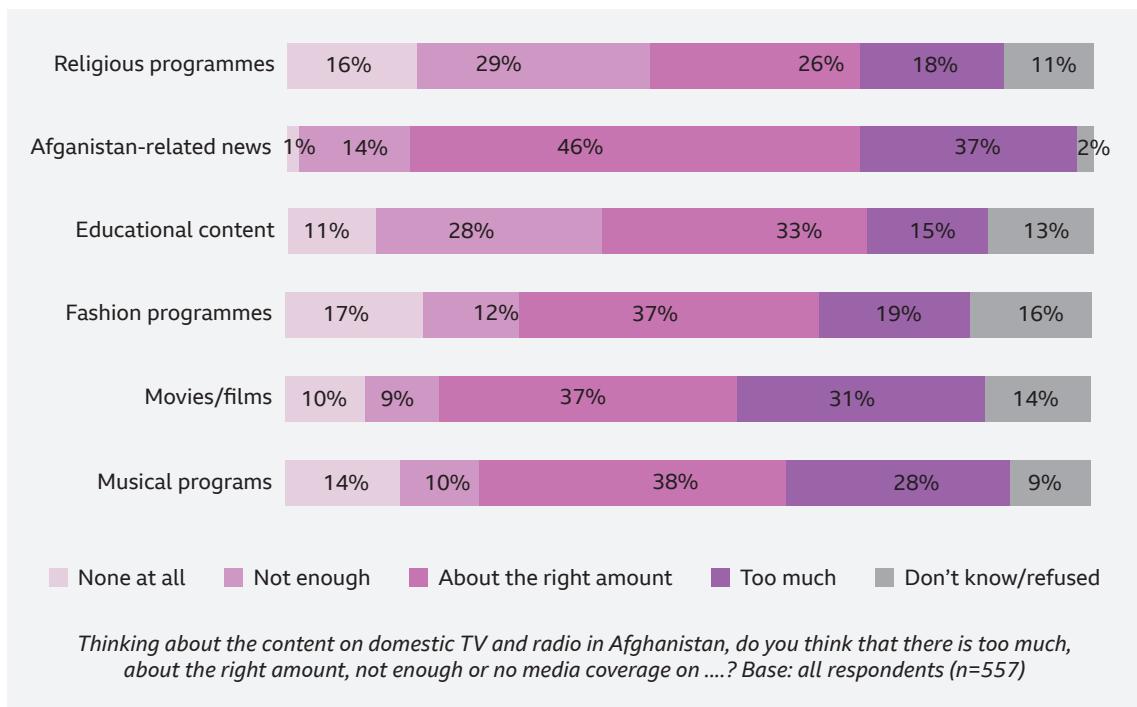


Figure 10: Views on the amount of TV and radio coverage on key topics, international media

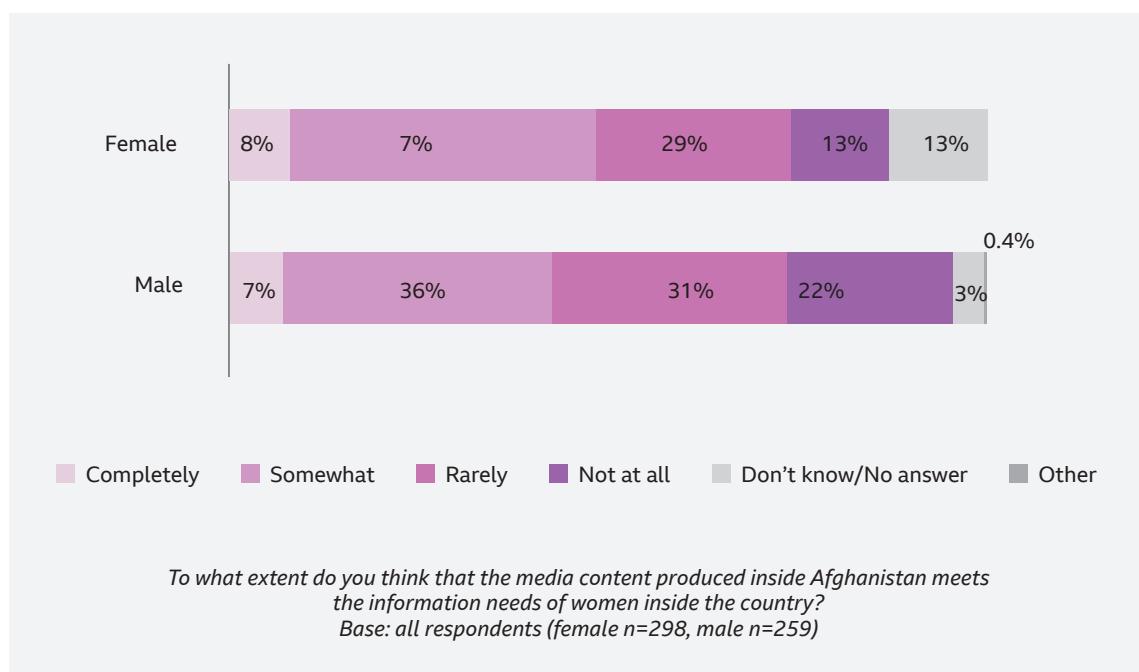


Previous research showed that while DFA rules apply to TV and radio in Afghanistan, social media has fewer restrictions so many media outlets have switched to creating more social media content so that they can address relevant issues.<sup>32</sup> As noted above, research participants in this study mention that news is also circulated through female-only social media spaces.

### Does the media meet women's information needs?

Despite various efforts to cater to female audiences through programmes on social issues, **67% of both genders feel that domestic media only “somewhat” or “rarely” meets women’s information needs**, although women are slightly less likely than men to say “rarely” (see Figure 10). Young people aged 15–24 are more likely to believe that domestic media meets the information needs of women.

Figure 11: Views on how far domestic media meets women’s needs, by gender

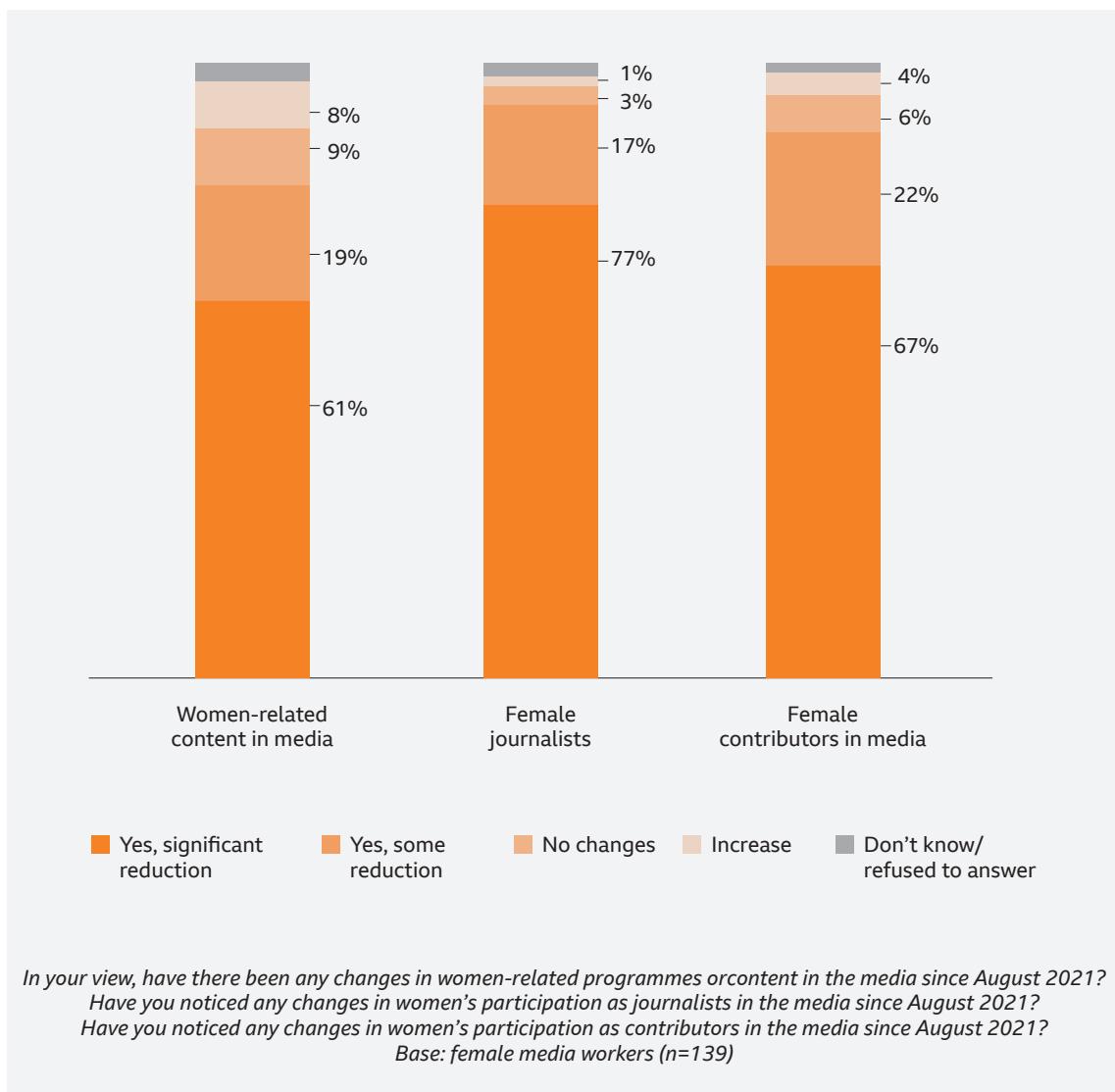


Previous research showed there are overall positive opinions about media outlets, suggesting that people understand the media is operating in a difficult environment. However, women were more critical in their opinions than men.<sup>33</sup>

## Female representation in Afghan media

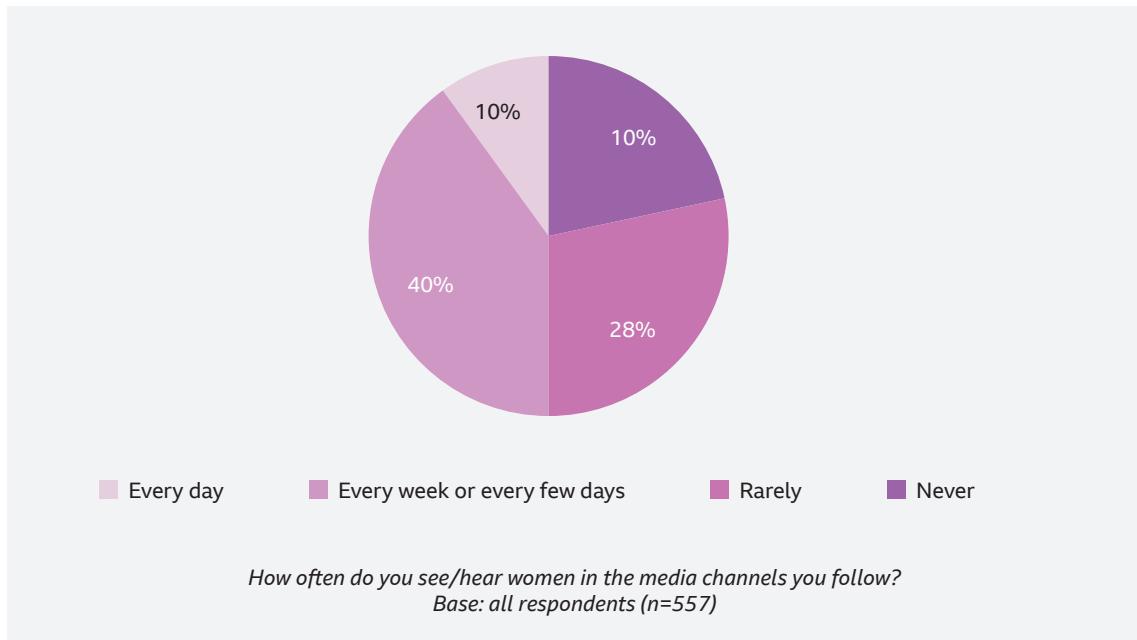
As outlined in the Introduction, the number of female journalists working in Afghanistan has dramatically decreased since 2021. The majority (61–77%) of female media workers surveyed for this study also noted a **significant decline in the number of female journalists and contributors, and women-related media content**, since then (see Figure 11).

Figure 12: Changes in women's representation in the media since August 2021



This lack of visibility of female journalists in the media is confirmed by findings from the general population. Half (50%) of people say they rarely or never see women in the media, only 41% could name a female journalist or presenter working in the media in Afghanistan and only 28% mention that their families have a favourite programme with a female presenter or actor. Additionally, most of the female journalists and programmes cited currently operate from outside Afghanistan, suggesting women's very limited presence in the domestic media.

Figure 13: Frequency of women's representation in media channels



Unsurprisingly, a large majority of people have seen a decline in women's involvement in media since 2021 and believe working conditions have become more challenging for women in the media.

Young people aged 15–24 were more likely to see women represented in the media and more highly rate the importance of including women in the media, but this group is also more aware that women's representation has reduced since 2021.

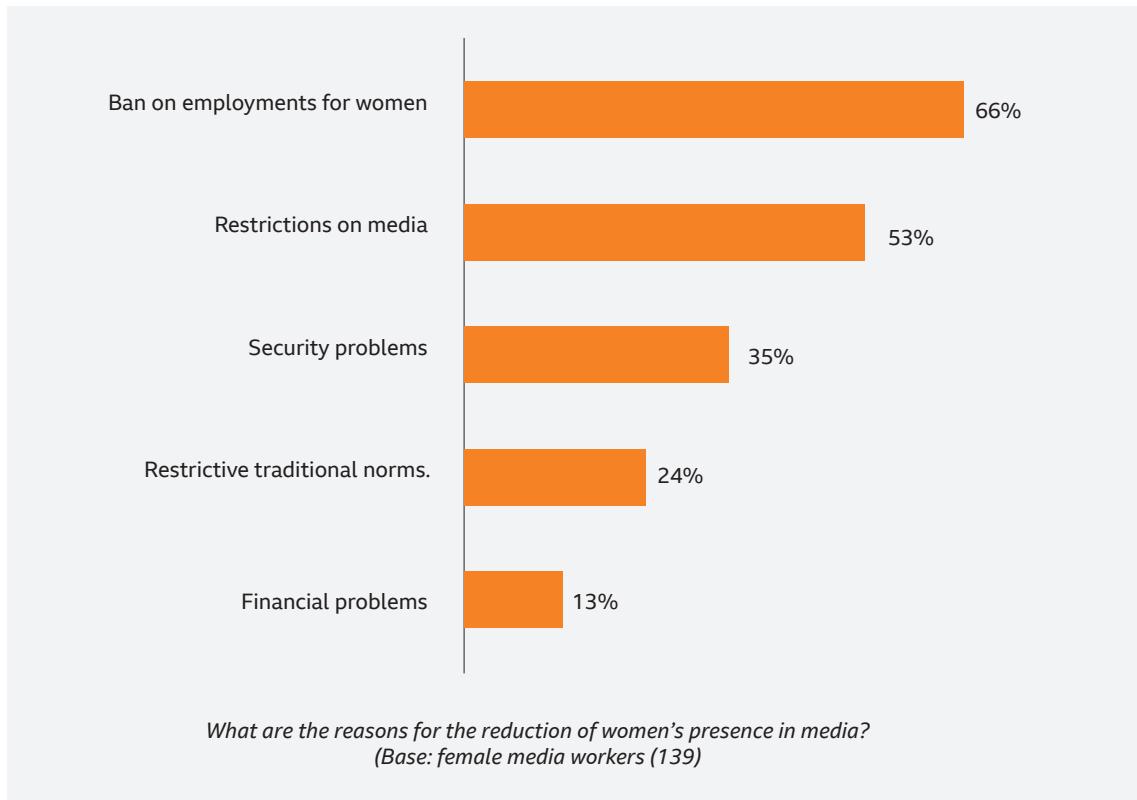
Female media workers cite several reasons for women's reduced media presence, notably the ban on women's employment (see Figure 14).

Female media workers note that having fewer women in the media has resulted in **a noticeable decline in content that focuses on women's issues and perspectives**, and generally a lack of diverse viewpoints and stories. Survey respondents from the general population also describe the importance of having women in the media, in terms of representation, their ability to relate to and communicate effectively with other women, and their economic contribution:

**“ The presence of women in the media is essential because women feel more comfortable communicating with other women and can connect better with them. Women are also more effective in photographing and filming, especially in cases related to women... Therefore, it is necessary to have women in journalism. ”**

*Female FGD participant, Kabul*

Figure 14: Reasons for women's reduced media presence

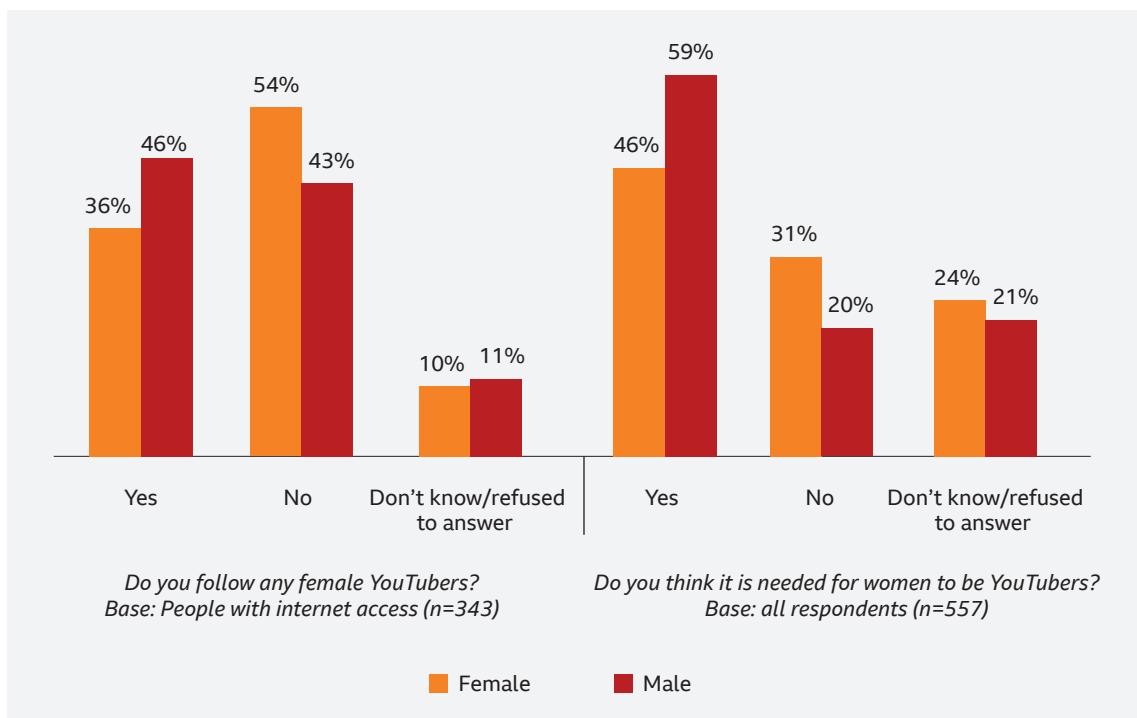


Kandahar province

## Female vloggers

Female vloggers are popular, perhaps because **social media provides more opportunities to represent women's voices in Afghanistan**. Two-fifths (41%) of respondents who access the internet follow a female YouTuber (46% of men and 36% of women). More urban than rural respondents follow female YouTubers (50% and 33%, respectively). Among people with internet access, men are more likely than women to follow a female YouTuber and to think that it is necessary for women to be YouTubers/vloggers.

Figure 15: Views on female YouTubers /vloggers



People who follow female YouTubers, cite accessing content covering daily lives (37%), general information (29%) and entertainment (24%). However, only 26% of the population (58% of those who follow female YouTubers) “always” or “often” find content relevant to their interests on these platforms while 32% say that they rarely or never find it relevant, suggesting that content produced by female YouTubers does not fully meet their needs.

Despite social media content being subject to fewer restrictions, female vloggers mention experiencing work-related challenges including harassment from the DFA:

**“One of my friends was active on social media and produced content. Taliban sent her several warnings telling her that she laughs too much in the videos, which is not allowed for a girl working in media. She quit.”**

*Female media worker, Kabul*

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“ When we were interviewing people on the street, two Taliban members came on their bike and broke our recorder. They threatened [that] if we continue our work, they will beat us up. ”

*Female vlogger*

### **Women-led media in exile**

Crucially, women are also represented in media content from outside Afghanistan. As noted above, **most of the female journalists and programmes featuring women that respondents mention operate from outside Afghanistan.**

There are also some media platforms, mainly news sites, led by Afghan women in exile that cover issues of importance to women that cannot be covered inside Afghanistan, sometimes in direct response to requests from women inside Afghanistan. These issues include menstruation, street harassment, gender-based violence, and the impact of restrictive policies on women.

“ We have reported on rape cases, harassment cases, Taliban abuses, as well as topics like menstruation and other taboos. We usually receive messages from women who want us to write about topics like street harassment and women’s mental health. ”

*Female media owner 1, media in exile*

However, the **ability of media outlets in exile to fill the gap in domestic content is limited** as they face challenges in accessing information sources and government officials inside Afghanistan.

In addition, the main focus of exiled media outlets is news and they tend to produce written content online, which means it is only accessible to women who can read and who have internet access. The women leading these media platforms acknowledge that their audience is not large, and they try to diversify content formats to include audio and video:

“ In Afghanistan people are not educated and can’t read so we need to change format. ”

*Female media owner 2, media in exile*

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Female media workers in Afghanistan highlight the importance of exiled media platforms in continuing the work of Afghan women journalists:

**“Organisations, including the exile[d] media outlets led by women, are very important because this is the continuation of what women have stood for in the past 20 years. ”**

*Female journalist, Badghis*

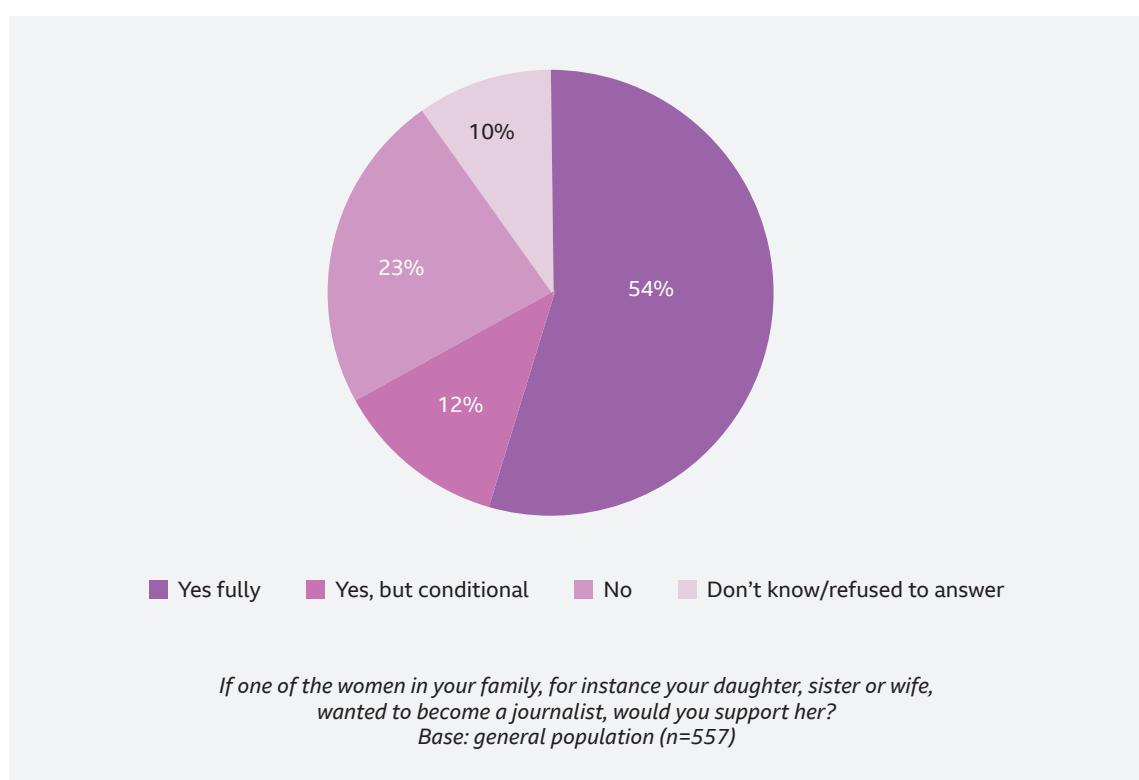
In a previous study, media owners based in Afghanistan say that diaspora media/exile media are often a source of MDM, which suggests this is another area in which media in exile require additional support.<sup>34</sup>

### **Perceptions of women working in the media**

**The general population is broadly supportive of women working in the media, with 89% of survey respondents agreeing that women should work in the media sector.** However, gender stereotypes abound in the types of programmes respondents perceive as appropriate for women to produce and feature in.

Over half (54%) of survey respondents say they would fully support a woman in their family to work as a journalist (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: General population support for women working in the media



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A further 12% say they would support a female relative to become a journalist under certain conditions, such as wearing the hijab and travelling with a *mahram* (a male chaperone, usually a woman's husband or a close male relative, as stipulated by DFA rules for women travelling outside the home):

**“She should not go to her duty alone and [she should] wear the Islamic hijab.”**

*Survey respondent*

Female media workers also say that their families are generally supportive of their work, although one in five (19%) say they have experienced family pressure due to their work. Some say their families fear for their safety, which sometimes limits their work activities.

**“One day, there was a very important news story that I had to cover. I needed to go out and conduct interviews and take clips. At the time, the Taliban arrested girls in different localities. I gave up on going out to do the interviews. My family also didn't allow me. I was afraid myself, too.”**

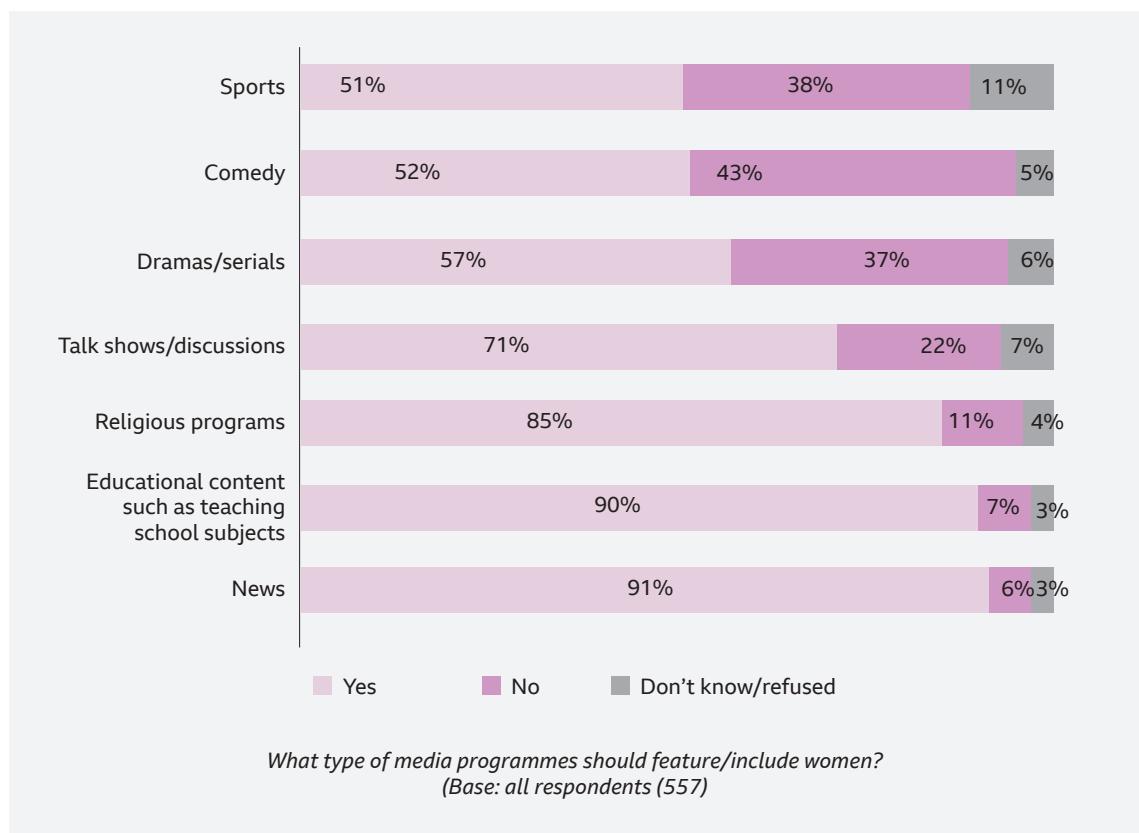
*Female journalist, Kabul*



Maimana city, Faryab province

**A majority of respondents feel that women should feature in all types of media content** discussed, overwhelmingly so in the case of news and educational content (see Figure 17). However, there are some differences in the perceptions of different demographic groups. For example, 56% of women feel that women should feature in comedy programmes compared with 49% of men, and young people aged 15–24 are more supportive of women featuring in comedy programmes than older age groups.

Figure 17: Perceptions on the types of media that should include women

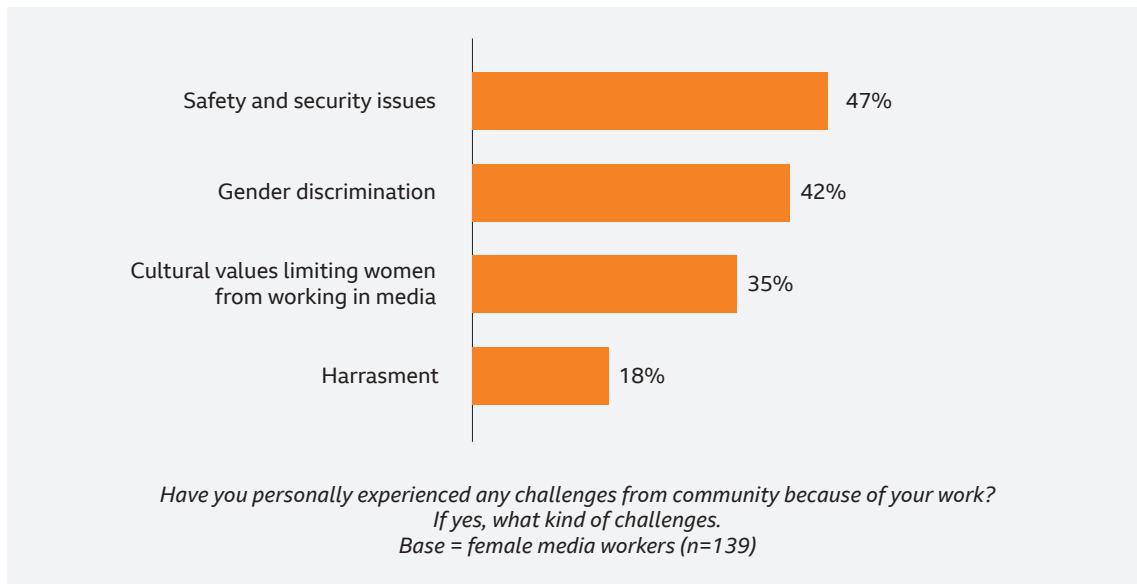


### Challenges faced by female media workers

**Nine out of 10 people agree that female media workers face increased challenges since August 2021**, and most respondents (83%) believe working conditions have become more difficult for women in media since 2021.

Female media workers who participated in the qualitative research report observing a shift in communities' behaviours towards them. Furthermore, 62% of the female media workers surveyed have experienced challenges from their communities because of their work, including safety and security issues, gender discrimination, cultural values that limit women working in media, and harassment (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Community challenges faced by female media workers



**The working environment for women media workers has become increasingly unstable since August 2021.** Two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed for this study say that the lack of a support system means that women media workers no longer feel safe in their communities. In addition, 55% believe that views about women being in public spaces have become more conservative. For example, female media workers mention that in certain areas, women working in media face negative perceptions and are sometimes accused of lacking morals and good character:

**“I am the only female journalist here and most people have negative views and discriminatory behaviour towards female journalists.”**

*Female journalist<sup>35</sup>*

To avoid penalties, media organisations must comply with strict rules set by the DFA, including women having to wear face masks, and not being allowed to co-present with men. This places media outlets under pressure and causes higher operational costs as they need to create separate workspaces for men and women.

Some female media workers report that the overall ban on women's work has led to media organisations undervaluing their contributions and not treating them well:

**“Since there are few job opportunities for women, our work is given less importance. This is used as a form of pressure. Due to the restrictions on female journalists, we are seen as less valuable in the media.”**

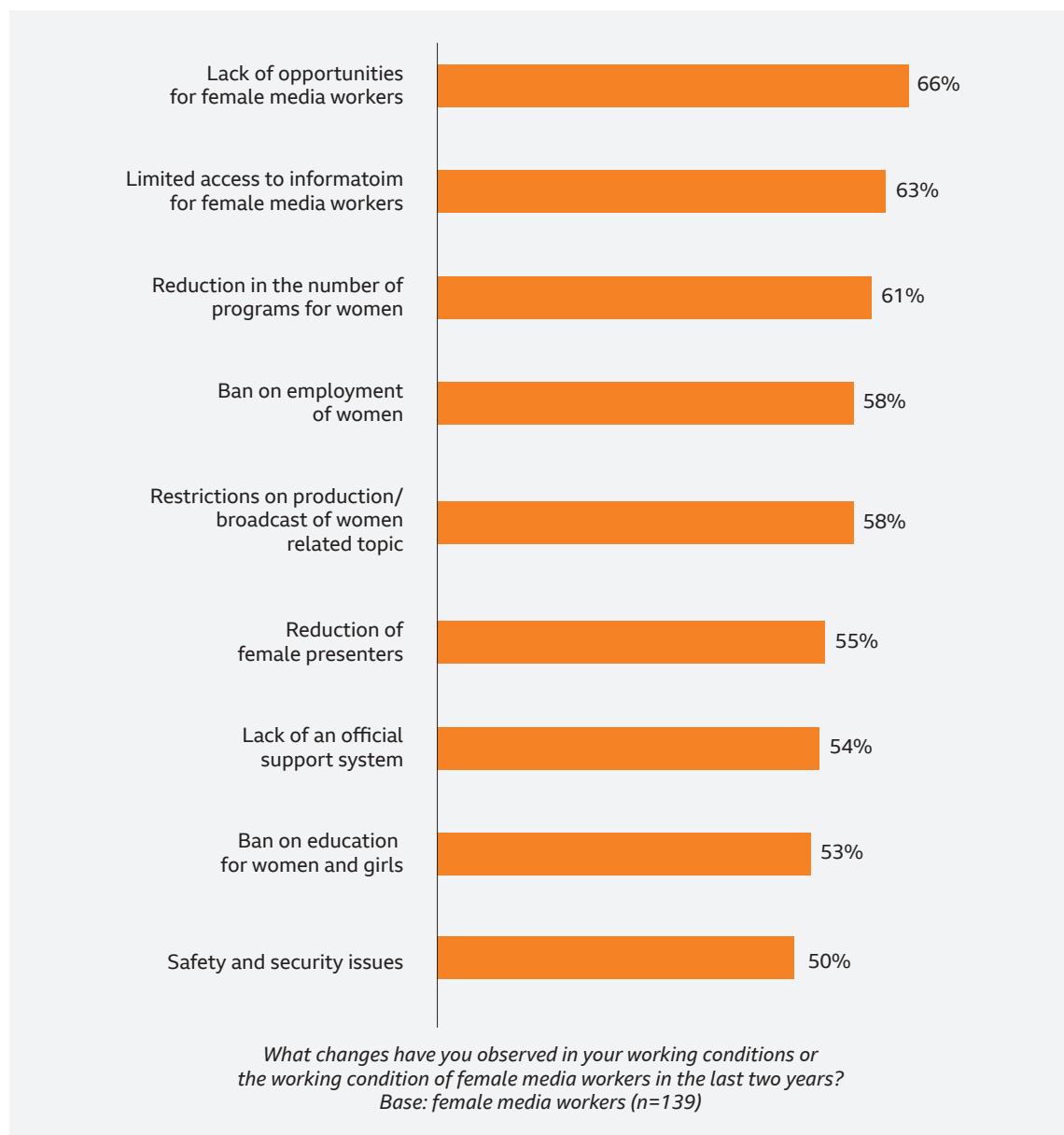
*Female media worker, Kabul*

Women media workers mention that salary issues, such as delayed or unpaid salaries, disproportionately affect female employees.

Gender segregation rules often result in women being asked to work from home or, in extreme cases, being let go by their employers. Movement restrictions mean that female staff can only travel to the office with a *mahram*, so some only visit the office to collect salaries and work from home the rest of the time.

Female media workers mention several changes since 2021 that have affected their work, mainly relating to DFA rules (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Post-2021 changes that have affected women's work in the media



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Evolving restrictions, including the ban on mixed gender presenting teams, the mahram requirement, and the ban on broadcasting women's voices and faces, have restricted women's ability to effectively contribute to the media. Many have even been stopped by the DFA or prevented from entering their workplace. Gender segregation and behavioural expectations also affect the way women can make programmes and the types of programmes they can make:

**“Now, if a female presenter takes a call from a man during the show, she is not allowed, even if the show is educational or on Islamic issues. Now, women can present in only two kinds of shows: educational shows like teaching school subjects or health shows. ”**

*Female journalist, Badghis*

**“If we laugh on a show, we will definitely be sacked. The radio station will also face consequences, including possible shut down. We have had Taliban [representatives] come to our office several times... threatening to shut the office down. ”**

*Female journalist, Nangarhar*

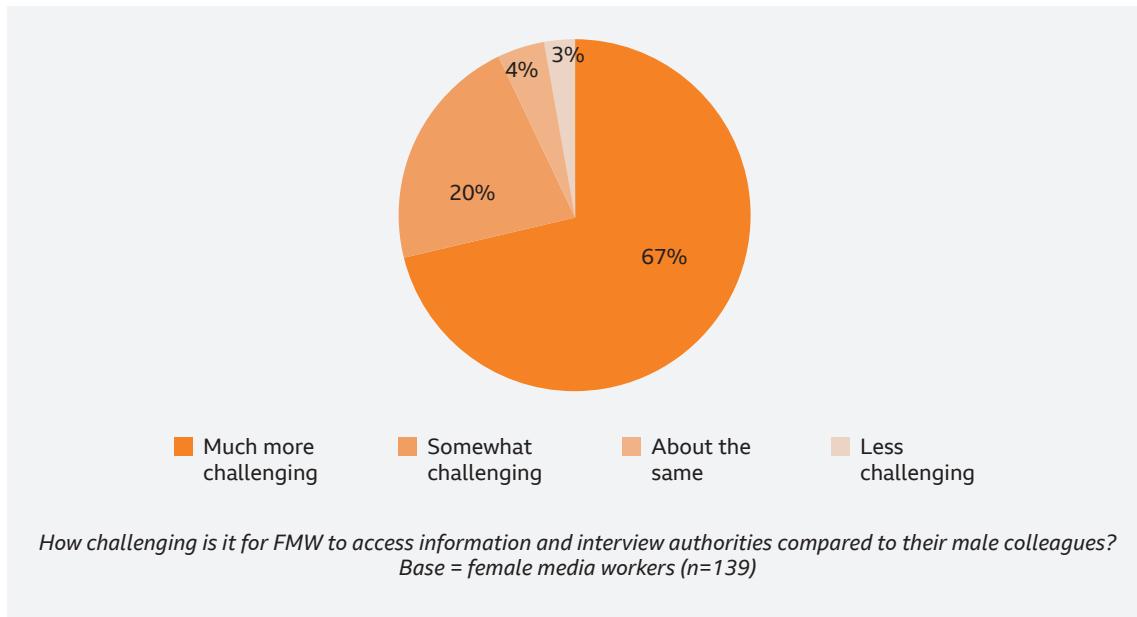
Female journalists also face challenges in interviewing people. Many people avoid being interviewed by female journalists out of fear of the consequences:

**“A friend of mine sought to interview people. She tried for many days but didn't make any progress. She finally decided to cancel the show altogether. People fear to be recorded and their videos published. ”**

*Female media worker, Daikundi*

**Lack of access to information is another serious challenge**, particularly for female media workers. A large majority (87%) of female media workers surveyed for this study believe it is much more challenging for them to access information or interview authorities compared with their male colleagues (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Challenges female media workers face compared with male colleagues



The qualitative research echoes this finding. Many female media workers say they have not been allowed to join press conferences or meetings organised by the DFA because of their gender:

**“When we went to the Ministry of Mines for a conference, they didn’t allow us [women] to enter. They told us to wait outside and said they would prepare a place for us later. Then they locked the gate, and by the time they opened it, the conference was already over. When we mentioned that they had sent us an invitation, they replied that we should have understood they don’t allow women.”**

*Female journalist, Kabul*

One-fifth (20%) of female media workers say they have been contacted by the authorities in response to their work activities. Some mention having received threats:

**“I received an anonymous call from the government and was told that I should no longer work in the media and that it will not be good for me if I do. Their calls were threatening and that is why I stopped working – they have made life a prison for me and my colleagues..”**

*Female media worker*

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Several journalists and media workers have been arrested by the DFA due to their work or content they have shared on social media. Over one-quarter (27%) of the female media workers surveyed for this study say they had been arrested or threatened with arrest, which has often resulted in self-censorship.

As noted above, media outlets have also received calls or visits from various ministries and government bodies.

**“I run a women-focused radio station. The [Ministry of Information and Culture] and the [General Directorate of Intelligence] have visited us multiple times to check on our programmes. ”**

*Female media owner*

In addition to these difficulties, changing rules continue to create new challenges for female media workers, and uncertainty about the future (see Box 1).

**Box 1: The impact of new restrictions**

Since conducting the research for this report, the PVPV law was announced. This is likely to have a big impact on women in media.

The new restrictions (see endnote 3) include:

- Women must be fully covered when in public, including their face
- Women's voices cannot be heard in public
- Unrelated men and women cannot directly look at each other
- Living beings (including people) cannot appear in the media

In September 2024, immediately after this law was announced, BBC Media Action interviewed seven female media workers in different provinces of Afghanistan to ask them about the potential impact of these new restrictions, and held a FGD with women journalists from Kabul to discuss the issue. Unsurprisingly, women working in the media are extremely anxious and unsure about the future of their jobs:

**“The moment I saw and heard about the new law on PVPV that stated that a woman's voice is 'awrah' [should not be heard], I immediately thought about my work. I thought I would no longer be able to work because I am a news presenter... If my voice is silenced, our office will be closed, and I won't be able to work anymore. ”**

*Female media worker*

These women continue to work while they wait to see how the law will be applied, but are being extra careful about their behaviour and what they say in programmes to avoid drawing any negative attention:

**“When I read about the PVPV law... I was anxious, particularly about whether I would be able to go to the office... I kept thinking that I would certainly receive a call from the office the next day telling me not to come because the office would be closed... I became extremely cautious during news reporting, ensuring that no words would come out of my mouth that could give the Taliban a reason to close the office.”**

*Female media worker*

They also expressed a great deal of frustration around women's voices being labelled as *awrah* (something that must be kept hidden to avoid causing shame).

**“This is not just about me; it affects all of us... If [a woman's] voice is considered 'awrah', what can she do? Should she learn sign language to communicate with others.”**

*Female media worker*

Media organisations are also unsure what the future holds. Some are planning to continue involving women even if they can no longer broadcast their voices:

**“The radio station manager and [I] concluded that we should support women until the last moment. If the broadcasting of women's voices is completely banned across Afghanistan, we will assign behind-the-scenes work to the women who are currently presenters and programme producers to help... prevent the complete exclusion of women from the media.”**

*Female media worker*

Some media outlets are advising their female staff on extra precautions they can take to avoid attracting attention:

**“ [Our director] held a meeting with all the women and told us to observe *hijab*, change our arrival and departure times, change our routes from time to time, and avoid going together to avoid drawing attention. ”**

*Female media worker*

Media workers also mention the law's negative impact on women more widely. Families are being extra protective of their daughters and even preventing them from visiting relatives to avoid attracting attention:

**“ Now families don't allow their daughters to visit even their relatives because they believe it attracts attention and could lead the Taliban to think that these girls are planning a protest. ”**

*Female media worker*

### **Women in the media's responses to these challenges**

Despite the restrictions, **female media workers remain deeply committed to their work** because of the important contribution this makes to society and because their jobs have a key role in their mental wellbeing and their families' financial stability. Many female media workers say that media is one of the few sectors in Afghanistan where women can still work, so they want to make the most of the opportunity to continue doing so.

Women in the media navigate DFA rules with extreme caution. By working from home, using pseudonyms, using digital tools and working behind the scenes as producers or writers, they hide their identities and avoid drawing attention to themselves.

They are extra careful about complying with DFA rules when making programmes:

**“ We are following the rules and... double-checking for every programme. We are doing our best to ensure proper oversight to avoid mistakes... With our commitment to being the voice of women and the people we serve, we continue.. ”**

*Female media worker, Kabul*

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When their work requires them to leave home, women media workers adhere strictly to DFA rules such as wearing a *hijab* and bringing a *mahram*:

**“Despite challenges, I have not given up and continue my work. I carry on from home, working online since we are not allowed to be present physically. We have tried to minimise office visits, wearing a hijab and bringing a mahram when necessary. Co-ordination and information transfer are done via WhatsApp. My interest in journalism drives me to overcome all restrictions and keep working, as well as to lift the voices of people, especially women”**

*Female media worker, Takhar*

Regardless of how careful female media workers are, they live and work in constant fear of being stopped, visited, threatened or arrested by the DFA.

#### **How support networks are helping female media workers**

Overall, **support networks for women working in the Afghan media only play a limited role** as only 40% of female media workers are aware of formal or informal support networks. Yet 71% of those who are aware of such networks have used them, and those who use them have found them useful in overcoming work-related challenges. Among those who have used these networks, 93% found them useful (25%) or very useful (68%).

Research participants mention specific examples of how support networks help them in their work:

**“We have an advocacy group for female journalists in Nangarhar that always stays informed about the media situation and the status of female employees. If needed, we advocate for female journalists. Our team has 10 members.”**

*Female media worker, Nangarhar*

Some female media workers criticise the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee for not supporting female journalists. It is clear that there is scope to raise awareness of networks that exist, support them to do more for female journalists, and potentially support women to create new support networks.

While some female media workers say that they have already received some training, they all **highlighted the need for more and continuous training**. Female media workers requested training on a wide range of topics including technical training, English language skills and mental health support.

Many women who worked in the media before August 2021 have left Afghanistan, taking their skills and experience with them, while those who have joined the sector since then urgently need training to be able to produce content that meets audience needs.

The lack of training is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where training for female media professionals is particularly rare:

**“I haven’t received any trainings, and there is nothing available for women in Baghlan province.”**

*Female journalist, Baghlan*

#### **Box 2: Spotlight on Kandahar**

Kandahar is one of Afghanistan’s more conservative provinces and stands out in terms of research findings.

While there are high levels of agreement in Kandahar that the media plays an important role in the lives of Afghan women, people there are less likely to mention entertainment programmes and communication among the roles media plays for women. They are also more likely than those from other provinces to feel that domestic media meets women’s needs: 23% of respondents in Kandahar say that domestic media meets the information needs of women “completely” compared with 8% of respondents overall.

Findings from discussions with female media workers suggest that women’s voices and shows are almost entirely missing from local media in Kandahar:

**“Women can’t work in southern provinces such as Kandahar and Helmand. I work from home, record my voice and send the recordings to the studio via WhatsApp.”**

*Female media worker*

Despite this, the general population in Kandahar is more likely than that in other provinces to say they have seen programmes featuring women. Some 81% of respondents in Kandahar are aware of female presenters or journalists working in Afghanistan, compared with 41% of respondents in the overall sample. And 66% of

respondents in Kandahar say that their family has a favourite programme with female presenters or actors, compared with 28% in the overall sample.

This is surprising considering there are fewer women working in the media in Kandahar than in other areas – perhaps people there are particularly sensitive to hearing women’s voices and seeing women in the media. In addition, Kandahar is in the middle compared with other provinces when it comes to support for women working in the media sector but have the lowest level of support for women to feature in drama programmes – 32% compared with 57% in the overall sample.

Based on examples from the qualitative research, female media workers in Kandahar seem to face more challenges than those in other provinces because of conservative norms, such as friends cutting off ties with them, and neighbours questioning their character and morality due to their work.

The general population in Kandahar is less likely than people in other provinces to mention security problems and restrictive traditional norms as reasons for women’s reduced media presence, suggesting participants do not see these as problems (perhaps they do not regard traditional norms as restrictive), or they are potentially afraid to speak out about these issues in a survey.

As a result of August 2024 rules against images of living beings appearing in the media (see Box 1 and footnote 3), the state-run National Radio Television (RTA) TV station in Kandahar has closed. Journalists working there were reportedly given the option to relocate to its station in Kabul. The Afghan Journalists Center states: *“This is a serious setback for the country’s visual media landscape, and this action is a violation of the country’s media law. The state-run television under Taliban control already lacks the freedom to operate and to fairly cover events in both Kabul and the provinces.”*<sup>36</sup>



Kandahar city

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## Conclusions

### Afghan media is not meeting women's information needs

Since their access to public space, education and work is severely restricted, **Afghan women's information needs are more pronounced than ever**. Those with media access increasingly rely on the media to keep updated on issues that concern them, such as policies affecting women, and to access educational content.

Despite this need, **Afghan women have less access to information than men**, particularly TV and the internet. Consequently, many rely on family as a key source of information – particularly in rural areas. This lack of access to multiple information sources also makes women more vulnerable to believing MDM.

**Media content produced in Afghanistan also does not meet women's needs.** Most people surveyed for this study agree that the media is very important in Afghan women's daily lives but that domestic media only somewhat or rarely meets women's needs. Issues relevant to women, such as the impact of restrictive policies, street harassment and menstruation, receive little attention in domestic media. Women-led media in exile try to address these issues, but have limited access to government officials and their content, which is largely online and in written form, excludes women without internet access and those who cannot read.

Generally, both **male and female audience members are not satisfied with the balance of content in the domestic media**. As a consequence of DFA restrictions, they complain that there is too much religious content in the media, and not enough entertainment content. Content addressing social issues, including educational content, is still allowed. This addresses a key need, particularly for women and girls who are denied access to education.

People in Afghanistan are more satisfied with the balance of content in international media, and are more likely to watch some types of entertainment content, such as movies, on international TV than domestic TV.

### Female media workers face multiple challenges, reducing women's media visibility

In line with the decreasing number of female journalists working in Afghanistan since 2021, audiences note **a decline in both the visibility of women in the media and in programmes addressing issues that are relevant to women**.

Female media workers note that having fewer women in the media has resulted in a noticeable decline in content that focuses on women's issues and perspectives, with issues that affect women receiving less coverage, and generally a lack of diverse viewpoints and stories.

Research participants from the general population also describe the importance of having women in the media, in terms of representation, their ability to relate to and communicate effectively with other women, and their economic contribution.

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Women-led media organisations in exile focus on issues that are important for women but that cannot be covered inside Afghanistan, including gender-based violence and restrictions. However, **media practitioners outside Afghanistan have a limited ability to fill the gaps in domestic content** as they struggle to access information sources and government officials inside Afghanistan.

Social media content is not restricted in Afghanistan and female vloggers are popular, but most people do not find their content relevant. Vloggers also face challenges such as harassment by the DFA and people hesitating to engage with them because of restrictions and related fears.

**The general population supports the idea of women working in media, but this is restricted to certain types of content such as news and educational programming.** This aligns with limitations reported by female media workers, such as not being allowed to laugh on air even before the 2024 ban on broadcasting women's voices.

Female media workers mention facing many challenges, including people having negative perceptions of women who work in the sector and also being hesitant to be interviewed because of fear of being seen talking to a female journalist.

In the workplace, female media workers report being undervalued, with some experiencing delayed or unpaid salaries. Due to segregation laws and the mahram requirement, many almost exclusively work from home.

**DFA restrictions limit female journalists' ability to effectively contribute to the media.** Some women journalists say they had been stopped by the DFA, prevented from entering their workplace and even arrested. Women have to be extra cautious when making programmes, for example not taking calls from men and avoiding laughing on air. Female journalists are also routinely denied access to information. Threats of arrest and a climate of fear and uncertainty have resulted in self-censorship for many.

The female media workers BBC Media Action spoke to about the 2024 PVPV law are extremely concerned about how this will be enforced and whether their jobs will continue. Despite the mental health challenges of these restrictions and uncertainties, some female media workers enjoy relative freedom compared with other women in Afghanistan, as women are still permitted to work in the media sector, albeit in limited ways.

There is potential to increase the impact of support systems and networks for women working in the Afghan media, as the minority of female journalists who have used these sources of support have found them valuable. Many also highlighted the need for more training and capacity building, particularly for women journalists in rural areas and post-2021 entrants to the sector.

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## Recommendations

### Enable the media to meet the needs of female audiences

Media represents an opportunity to reach, inform, entertain and educate women in Afghanistan, and provide outside perspectives in their heavily restricted lives. Despite DFA restrictions, there are ways in which media content could better serve female audience members.

However, domestic media organisations are struggling for advertising revenue in the current climate, particularly as the content formats they can produce are so limited, causing some audiences to turn to international media.

Journalists and media houses serving Afghan audiences should:

- Consider ways to provide women with the information they need through platforms they can access and in formats permitted in Afghanistan, such as educational content and news. Consider the information needs of women who are further marginalised, including women in rural areas and those with disabilities.
- Consider the mental health needs of female audiences and how to provide entertainment and stress relief within the confines of the formats allowed (or via media outlets operating in exile).
- Promote positive portrayals of women to help change negative perceptions, and produce diverse and inclusive content that reflects women's voices and experiences, including rural women and those with disabilities.

The international community should:

- Support female media workers in exile to produce content related to women's issues that cannot be covered within Afghanistan, providing necessary information in formats that appeal to women.
- Support female media workers in exile to dispel myths and MDM, including by providing guidance and training on how and why to avoid spreading MDM and how to fact check content.
- Promote partnerships between exiled and in-country media workers to enable information sharing and highlight important topics that cannot be covered by domestic media.
- Provide training and support to help media outlets within Afghanistan to find creative ways to meet their audiences' needs without contravening DFA restrictions.

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## Support female media workers

The challenges faced by female media workers need to be addressed on several fronts.

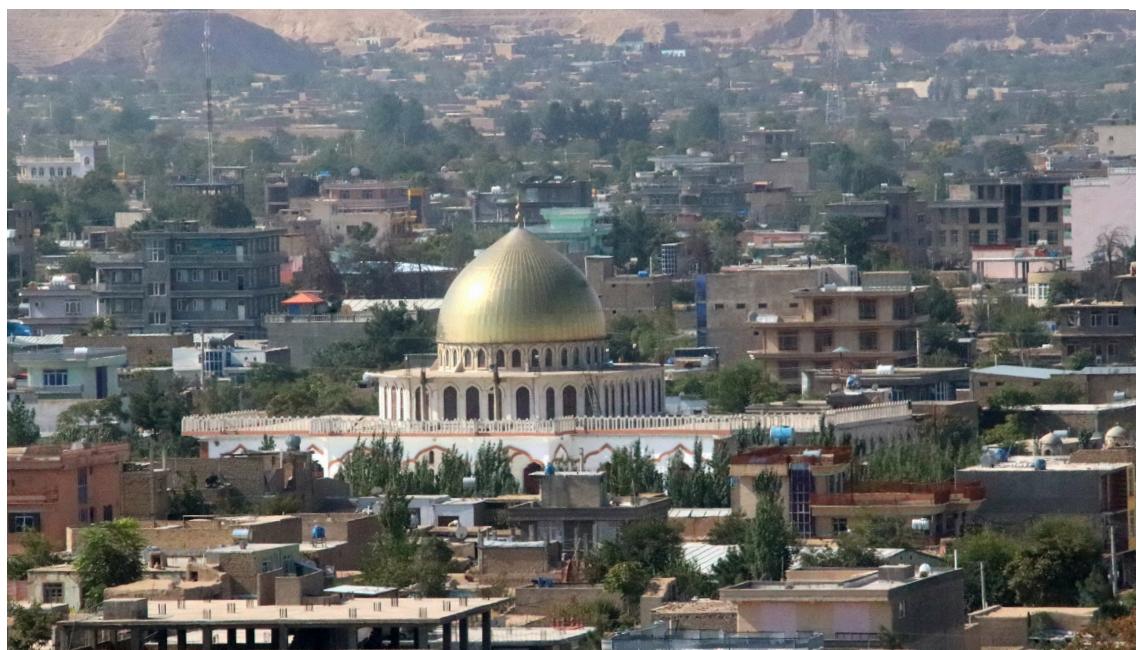
Media outlets and the international community should directly support female media workers in Afghanistan by:

- Facilitating access to skills development and long-term training programmes tailored to their needs.
- Establishing mentorship programmes to guide and assist them.
- Creating new, and supporting existing, safe spaces and initiatives for them to share experiences and seek advice, including on their mental health.
- Providing financial and capacity-building support for vloggers in the form of mentoring and grants.
- Actively addressing gender-based discrimination in the workplace to create a fair working environment for them.
- Providing grants to help media outlets employ women. This might include meeting the cost of creating separate workspaces for women to align with segregation rules, and providing equipment and tools for women who work from home, particularly outside urban centres.

**Female media workers also expressed a desire for the international community to put pressure on the DFA to remove restrictions on women's and girls' education and work to allow them to participate more fully in public life, including in the media.**

**“Women should be present in all areas of life; the media is not an exception.”**

*Female FGD participant, Kandahar*



Maimana city, Faryab province

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2023) Since the Taliban takeover, 40% of Afghan media have closed, 80% of women journalists have lost their jobs [online]. Available via: Since the Taliban takeover, 40% of Afghan media have closed, 80% of women journalists have lost their jobs | RSF [accessed 27th September 2024].

<sup>2</sup> BBC Persian (2021). The new directive from the Taliban prohibits women from appearing in films and TV dramas [online]. Available via [هزات لمعناروتسد در گ عنم ىننويزیولت یاههانشیامن و اهملیف رد روضح زا ار نانز نابلط BBC News ایسرا](#) [accessed 14 October 2024].

<sup>3</sup> The PVPV law prohibits broadcasting the following content in Afghanistan: (1) Films contrary to the principles of Sharia and Afghan values; (2) Foreign films that are against Afghan culture and traditions that promote immorality; (3) Comedy and entertainment programmes that insult people; (4) Serials in which religious rituals and human dignity are insulted; (5) Films and videos that expose men's intimate parts; (6) The appearance of female journalists without a hijab; (7) Serials featuring a female actor; (8) Serials and films in which Prophets and Companions have acted, or their images are displayed. The Taliban also prohibited other media content including music and entertainment.

<sup>4</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2024) Afghanistan: 'Taliban prohibit journalists from collaborating with Afghanistan International news channel [online]. Available via <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-taliban-prohibit-journalists-collaborating-afghanistan-international-news-channel> [accessed 14 October 2024].

<sup>5</sup> The province has not been mentioned here to protect the privacy of the research participant.

<sup>6</sup> AP News (2024) The Taliban publish vice laws that ban women's voices and bare faces in public [online]. Available via <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-vice-virtue-laws-women> [accessed 26 September 2024].

<sup>7</sup> Macharia, S. (2020) Who Makes the News?: 6th Global Media Monitoring Project [online]. Accessible via [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG\\_FINAL\\_.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL_.pdf) [accessed 16 August 2024]. & Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) (2022) Gender Learning Brief [online]. Accessible via [https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed\\_learning-brief\\_gender\\_r023.pdf](https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed_learning-brief_gender_r023.pdf) [accessed 26 August 2024].

<sup>8</sup> Macharia, Who Makes the News?: 6th Global Media Monitoring Project; PRIMED, Gender Learning Brief.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (2023) Bridging the Gender Digital Divide: Challenges and an Urgent Call for Action for Equitable Digital Skills Development. New York.

<sup>10</sup> Macharia, Who Makes the News?: 6th Global Media Monitoring Project.

<sup>11</sup> Macharia, Who Makes the News?: 6th Global Media Monitoring Project; & PRIMED, Gender Learning Brief.

<sup>12</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Since the Taliban takeover, 40% of Afghan media have closed, 80% of women journalists have lost their jobs.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> International Media Support (2024) For women journalists in Afghanistan, showing up for work is an act of resistance!. Accessible via <https://www.mediassupport.org/news/for-women-journalists-in-afghanistan-showing-up-for-work-is-an-act-of-resistance/> [accessed 27 September 2024].

<sup>15</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2022) Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul [online]. Available via <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-has-lost-almost-60-its-journalists-fall-kabul> [accessed 27 September 2024].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Zaki, et al. (2023) A survey of media consumption in Afghanistan [online]. Accessible via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/media-consumption-in-afghanistan-survey-report-final.pdf> [accessed 16 August 2024].

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch (2024) World Report 2024: Afghanistan Events of 2023 [online]. Accessible via <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/afghanistan-0> [accessed 27 September 2024].

<sup>19</sup> BBC (2022); Tolo News (2023).

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<sup>20</sup> Zaki et al., *A survey of media consumption in Afghanistan*.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>22</sup> BBC Media Action (2024) *Challenges and choices: Afghan women's media use and preferences amid restrictions* [online]. Accessible via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/afghanistan-research-summary-april-2024.pdf> [accessed 16 August 2024].

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<sup>23</sup> The sample included 68 women with disabilities and 83 men with disabilities. Despite the fairly small base, the difference between women with and without disabilities is statistically significant.

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<sup>24</sup> Mis-information is false information shared without the intention of harm. Disinformation includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented, and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit. Mal-information is information based on some aspect of reality but shared out of context to create harm to a person or organization. For details, refer to: Taylor & Francis (n.d.) *Misinformation vs. disinformation What are the differences?* [online]. Available via What's the difference between Misinformation and Disinformation? [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024].

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<sup>25</sup> Unpublished BBC Media Action research on mis-, dis- and mal-information conducted in 2024.

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<sup>26</sup> Restrictions that were already in place when this research took place.

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<sup>27</sup> Zaki et al., *A survey of media consumption in Afghanistan*.

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<sup>28</sup> BBC Persian, *The new directive from the Taliban prohibits women from appearing in films and TV dramas*.

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<sup>29</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists (2024) *Taliban jams Afghanistan International broadcasts in Kabul* [online]. Accessible via <https://cpj.org/2024/09/taliban-jams-afghanistan-international-broadcasts-in-kabul/> [accessed 14 October 2024].

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<sup>30</sup> Voice of America (2022) *Taliban Defend Ban on VOA, RFE/RL Broadcasts in Afghanistan* [online]. Available via <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-defend-ban-on-voa-rfe-rl-broadcasts-in-afghanistan/6857676.html> [accessed 14 October 2024].

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<sup>31</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2024) *Afghanistan: 'Taliban prohibit journalists from collaborating with Afghanistan International news channel*.

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<sup>32</sup> BBC Media Action, *Challenges and choices: Afghan women's media use and preferences amid restrictions*.

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<sup>33</sup> Zaki et al., *A survey of media consumption in Afghanistan*.

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<sup>34</sup> BBC Media Action, *Challenges and choices: Afghan women's media use and preferences amid restrictions*.

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<sup>35</sup> Province not mentioned here to protect the research participant's privacy.

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<sup>36</sup> Afghanistan Journalists Center (2024) *Taliban Halts State TV Broadcasts in Kandahar Over 'Images of Living Beings* [online]. Available via Afghanistan Journalist Center - Taliban Halts State TV Broadcasts in Kandahar Over 'Images of Living Beings' [accessed

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