Unveiling Employment Opportunities and Training Needs in Afghanistan's Labour Market under the Taliban rule

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0. Executive Summary

This paper aims to analyze the current situation of the Afghan labor market. This aim is not a purpose in itself. However, it is connected to the more comprehensive goal of the Hope-project which is to develop skills and competencies for Afghan women whose access to the Afghan labor market has been brutally restricted. Primarily, we want to address academic Afghan women and offer online certificates that could improve their access to the Afghan labor market or international labor markets in 2023.

This report addresses the following questions: What is the current state of the labor market in Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, particularly about employment opportunities for Afghan women? Which sectors or industries demonstrate potential for employment opportunities for Afghans, especially women, in the current context? How can (online) training programs be customized to meet the needs of Afghans, particularly women, and enhance their employability in the labor market under Taliban control? We deliver a secondary analysis of published reports as well as a qualitative study based on expert-interviews and a quantitative study based on an analysis of job offers published in Acbar.

One of the most important insights of our analysis is that there is a surprisingly high number of job offers – around one quarter – offered exclusively for women. Following the Western mass-media reporting about Afghanistan, this is a surprise. The most important labour market sectors for women are health, education and business. This picture has consequences for the role of further education and online courses which should be – in our view – to a large extent tailored to the most relevant job opportunities. On the other hand, the key point regarding online training courses is that it should not be viewed as a long-term solution for the education of women facing deprivation in Afghanistan. Rather, it serves as a temporary measure to address the constraints imposed by the Taliban on Afghan women. Some experts interviewed in this research expressed concern about the acceptance of online education by international institutions as an alternative to formal education. They perceive it as a potential step towards normalizing the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on Afghan women.

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1. Introduction

August 2021 marked a significant change in many Afghan women's lives when the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan and enacted a series of rules that ordered social and professional life, restricting the rights and freedoms of women in Afghanistan. These restrictions were particularly evident in the education sector. At first only women were dismissed from studying and working at the university. Subsequently this was followed by school bans for female pupils from the seventh grade. Also, in other areas of society, women were increasingly forbidden to pursue their former jobs and had to confine themselves to activities in the home. At the same time, former leaders were deposed, and many people - especially highly educated people - fled Afghanistan. Furthermore, many international organizations withdrew (partially or entirely) from Afghanistan. All this affected the labor market in many complex ways. Women and girls in Afghanistan, in particular, who since 2001 have enjoyed increasing education and the associated job opportunities, have lost many of their new gains. At the same time, the situation in 2023 is different from that at the end of the 20th century because the Internet has created new opportunities for staying in touch with other people, new educational opportunities, and opportunities to work from home. However, there is hardly any empirical information on the job opportunities currently available to men and women in Afghanistan, on the prerequisites they need to meet, for example, in terms of skills, and on how they can be prepared for them in the best possible way.

This paper aims to analyze the current situation of the Afghan labor market. This aim is not a purpose in itself. However, it is connected to the more comprehensive goal of the Hope-project[1,] which is to develop skills and competencies for Afghan women whose access to the Afghan labor market has been brutally restricted. Primarily, we want to address academic Afghan women and offer online certificates that could improve their access to the Afghan labor market or international labor markets in 2023. In order to develop tailored measures and courses designed for the labor market's needs and demands rather than based only on the imaginations of Western politicians, NGOs, or researchers, an analysis of the current Afghan labor market is mandatory. Furthermore, we need to conduct this analysis as empirically as possible (we will return to this in the paragraph "Methods and methodological remarks").

According to this frame of the report, our analysis of the Afghan labor market will address the following research questions:

- What is the current state of the labor market in Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, particularly about employment opportunities for Afghan women?
- Which sectors or industries demonstrate potential for employment opportunities for Afghans, especially women, in the current context?
- How can (online) training programs be customized to meet the needs of Afghans, particularly women, and enhance their employability in the labor market under Taliban control?

We are cognizant that an analysis of the Afghan labor market in 2023 is confronted with many challenges. First, the availability of valid data for Afghanistan is very poor, and much data is extrapolated (cf. Bittlingmayer et al., 2020). This is true for almost every sector, for instance, economy, health, or education. The existing economic reports are often biased, mainly when they are products

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[1] The Hope-project is funded by the German Academic Exchange Office (DAAD). It started in 2021, before the Taliban took over the power in Afghanistan in July 2021 and ended December 2023.

from the Ministry for Economy, because they should document positive developments during the government supported by the international community and NATO. Furthermore, most of the studies ignore the specific conditions of rural areas. Even though around three-quarters of Afghans live in rural areas or are nomads, they primarily focus on urban settlements. "Based on the estimated population Graphs the urban population is 8.0 million while the rural population is 23.4 million and the remain 1.5 million is Kochi (Nomadic)." (NSIA, 2021, p. 3) However, there has been a broad consensus that there was progress and positive development in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021. Notably, in education and health, many indicators demonstrate this positive development: rates of school enrolment, absolute numbers of students and universities, child mortality rate, or life expectancy rate (cf. the contributions in Bittlingmayer et al., 2019).

On the other hand, there is also a broad consensus in social science that the NATO-led allies have not been mainly concerned with building a sustainable Afghan economy. Most jobs created after 2001 were directly linked to services for foreign soldiers and NGOs. After 2014, when the withdrawal of the foreign military started, mass unemployment immediately returned to Afghanistan. There is the argument that the Western coalition pumped so much money into the Afghan economy that corruption was the logical consequence of this (lack of) strategy. "The US government flooded Afghanistan with far more money than the country could absorb." (Whitlock, 2021, p. 211) The OECD- and World Bank-driven policy in Afghanistan (and worldwide) to invest in education to build economic development and growth has failed, as has the idea of creating sustainable educational markets. These policies did not reflect the particularity of Afghanistan's history, culture, and economic structure. Afghanistan's economy has been described earlier as a simultaneous mixture of feudalism, pre-feudalism, archaic, and capitalistic (Samimy, 2017, p. 21). In short, economic development in Afghanistan over the past two decades has been nothing short of a disaster. In 2021, the Taliban   took over a largely dysfunctional economy. In the last two years, they worsened the situation by pushing women out of large parts of the labor market. According to a recently published report from the World Bank the economic performance is still very poor but the picture is ambivalent. The food prices have fallen, the self-reported welfare improved and the export increased. Nevertheless, poverty still hits (at least) half of the Afghan population (World Bank, 2023a). We cannot change the economic and political structures in Afghanistan's currently confusing economic situation. However, our project wants to identify niches and areas where Afghan women can meaningfully contribute to increasing household income. This market analysis should help us to develop tailored certificates.

2. Methodology and Methods

In order to come close to a realistic picture of the current Afghan labor market and economy, different sorts of data are used and analyzed in this report. In the following chapters, we analyze macro-data published by international organizations like the World Bank, UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation, and others. Subsequently, we analyze the documents and reports published by the Taliban regime resp—the Afghan Ministry of Economy. In the analysis, our primary focus will be on the three research questions mentioned above. We particularly look for labor market segments that are still promising and – at least partly – open for women.

Complementary to the secondary macro-data analysis, we conducted qualitative expert interviews with economic and educational experts still living in Afghanistan. In contrast to the published reports, these interviews serve as first-hand sources.

We conducted interviews with five individuals. They were selected for interviews purposefully, all of whom are experts with relevant work experience in the education and empowerment of women in Afghanistan. Among these five interviewees, three are men and two are women. Interviews were conducted online in August 2023 using WhatsApp. The duration of the interviews ranged between 40 and 75 minutes. Participants were allowed to answer the questions listed in the interview guide without a time limit during the interview. To ensure the privacy and security of the interviewees, their names are omitted from this research text, and they are assigned numbers for citation purposes. The background and professional experience of each interviewee are detailed in the following table:

Table 2.1-Background and professional experience of interviewees

Interviewee	The background and professional experience
I1	He is an economist and a university professor.
I2	He has years of experience in non-governmental organizations focused on technical and vocational training in Afghanistan.
I3	She is a human rights activist and leads a non-governmental organization in Afghanistan.
I4	Before the Taliban came to power, she was involved in women empowerment programs of the Afghanistan government.
I5	He has worked as an education specialist and researcher for many years in Afghanistan.

We used the same self-developed interview guide for all expert interviews to make the interviews easy to compare. The interview guide contains thirteen questions and is documented in *Annex 1*. We wanted to know from the experts how they estimate the chances for (academic) women to be employed and in which sectors they can identify opportunities. Examples of the questions from the interview guide are:

- "Could you please provide an overview of the current state of the labor market in Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, particularly in relation to employment opportunities for educated Afghan women?"
- "What job opportunities are currently available for educated Afghan women?" or
- "In your opinion, which sectors or industries demonstrate potential for employment opportunities for Afghans, especially women, in the current context?"

We used a slightly open form of qualitative interview analysis for the analysis. Because the categories of interest are already fixed for this analysis, we could use a qualitative content analysis without establishing a coding procedure.

Last but not least, we collected and analyzed quantitative data. In order to conduct a quantitative analysis of the Afghan job market, we have collected data on the job offerings from Acbar website[2], the largest job advertisement portal in Afghanistan[3]. In order to evaluate the importance of the Acbar-portal for the Afghan labor market we will give a short overview about it.

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[2] ACBAR: List Job; https://www.acbar.org/jobs; last check 2024/1/20.

[3] It is to mention that data on all relevant variables are not available on the website. For instance data on whether an applicant gets hired is not available. It also barely covers government positions.

The portal called ACBAR is the abbreviation for Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development's (ACBAR) official website. Bringing together 193 domestic and foreign NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) operating in Afghanistan, ACBAR is an autonomous organization. Through the website, ACBAR is able to coordinate and streamline relief and development efforts and offer resources, information, and assistance to its member groups. It has sections on publishing, job opportunities, coordination, capacity building, advocacy, and more. The website also includes papers, studies, events, and announcements about development and relief activities in Afghanistan. ACBAR was established in August 1988, in Peshawar, Pakistan, in response to the need for more effective coordination of aid and service delivery from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that deal with Afghan refugees in Pakistan and across the border in Afghanistan. Since 2002, the secretariat, or main office, of ACBAR has been located in Kabul. Five provincial managers are also employed by ACBAR and are situated at member offices in Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sherif, Herat, Kunduz, and Kandahar. The highest decision-making body of ACBAR is the General Assembly, which is a democratic assembly with representation from all members. Every two years, the General Assembly convenes. The 15 NGOs that make up the ACBAR Steering Committee are led by the Chair and assisted by the Vice-Chair and Treasurer. Information exchange, coordination, and advocacy with NGO members, the government, the UN, donors, and the larger civil society are the main foci of the activities. It also helps its members develop their capacity. The secretariat's several departments oversee these operations.

Jobs relating to Afghanistan's relief and development sector are advertised on the ACBAR website. These employment openings may be in a variety of sectors, including capacity building, development initiatives, advocacy, coordination, and humanitarian assistance. The website functions as a career hub where businesses can advertise openings and job seekers can locate openings in the industry. It serves as a platform for NGOs and other organizations to get in touch with applicants who might be interested in working in the development and humanitarian sectors in Afghanistan.

In order to analyse the ACBAR data we have employed a Web Scraper, which is a Google Chrome extension, to harvest data. Web harvesting automates the extraction of data from websites. This allows the configuration of the extension via a graphical user interface. First, the relevant variables and data elements are identified. After that, the extension interacts with websites implementing the scraping guidelines and retrieves the necessary information. After processing and formatting the data, one can export it in a number of formats, including Excel and CSV. A great advantage of this web harvesting method is its simplicity and efficiency.

Employing this web harvesting method, we have collected data on job offerings on eight different dates from June to September 2023. The harvesting time was chosen in a way to cover at least one quarter (June – September) and the exact date was chosen randomly conditioning a minimum of one week break in between. Table 2.2 depicts a summary of the data acquisition from the ACBAR website.

Table 2.2: Summary of data acquisition from ACBAR website

Round	Download Date	# of variables	Number of Job Ads/New ads	Total Number of Job Ads*
1	June 19, 2023	8	398 / 0	398

2	July 1, 2023	8	262 / 208	606
3	July 8, 2023	8	303 / 252	858
4	July 17, 2023	8	314 / 280	1138
5	July 23, 2023	8	296 / 253	1391
6	Aug 1, 2023	8	316 / 275	1666
7	Aug 11, 2023	8	309 / 262	1928
8	Sep 16, 2023	8	291 / 271	2199 (=total number of cases)

*the total number is calculated after removing the duplicates

The variables on which data are being collected include Location, Nationality, Job Category, Employment type, Gender, Experience, and Minimum Education. We have also collected the concrete name of the occupational positions as well as the key skills required for the jobs. Figure 2.1 depicts a screenshot of a typical job advertisement on the website.

Figure 2.1: A screenshot of a job advertisement on the ACBAR website

Additionally, the advertisement includes details on the hiring organization, job description, submission guidelines, and some employers mentioned directly required key skills in their job offers.

Since the advertised jobs cover almost all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, in order to avoid the curse of dimensionality problem, we have categorized them into different regional zones. Table 2.3 details the categorization of the zones.

Table 2.3: Categorization of the Location

Zone	Provinces
Kabul Zone	Maidan Wardak, Logar, Kapisa, Parwan
Kabul City	Kabul
North Zone	Samangan, Baghlan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pol
West Zone	Badghis, Herat, Nimruz, Farah, Ghur
Central Highlands	Bamian, Daikondi, Ghazni
North-East Zone	Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, Panjshir
South Zone	Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Oruzgan
East Zone	Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Nuristan, Kunar

Creating categories for the zone results in some further duplications in the dataset, since some job offers were published in different zones parallelly. This resulted in the total number of observations to be reduced to 2064. In the subsequent analysis we use the last version of the dataset.

From a methodological perspective, we used a mixed methods approach, following a deductive logic of concretization. We start with published macro-data, try to validate it based on expert interviews and analyze job offers at the micro-level. Finally, in the discussion part, we look for mutual contradictions and confirmations when we compare the results of the different analyses we conducted.

3. Current State of the Labor Market in Afghanistan under Taliban Control

Afghanistan is currently facing numerous challenges stemming from dictatorship and political isolation, leading to a devastating crisis that has profoundly affected the lives and livelihoods of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, such as women, children, minority communities, and people from rural areas. The repercussions of these circumstances extend to the labor market, with

key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, public administration, social services, and construction, experiencing severe hardship, resulting in substantial job losses and reductions in labor income (World Bank, 2023a, 2003b). Restrictions have particularly impacted women in their movement and employment opportunities. The labor market situation for women, including young women, remains critical and challenging, and it has been further exacerbated by a recent edict prohibiting women from working in both national and international non-governmental organizations (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

In Afghanistan, labor force participation among people of working age (15.9 million) has historically been limited. According to a survey conducted in 2017, only 53.9 percent of individuals (8.5 million people) in this age group are either employed or actively seeking work. This is primarily because of the very low levels of female activity in the labor market. As a result, Afghanistan's labor force shows a highly uneven gender composition, with 6.4 million men constituting 75.4 percent and 2.1 million women comprising 24.6 percent of the workforce (Central Statistics Organization, 2018) (See Table 3.1).

The country's labor force is characterized by an exceptionally young age structure, with a substantial proportion of individuals below the age of 30. Approximately half of the economically active population (50.2 percent) falls within the age range of 14[4] to 29 years. Combined with the next 10-year age group, 6.0 million individuals in the labor force (71.3 percent) are below 40 years old.

Table 3.1: Labour force by ten-year age group and by sex (in thousands and percentages)

Age	In thousands			In percentages		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Total	6,392.7	2,085.8	8,478.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
14-19	1,129.8	464.4	1,594.2	17.7	22.3	18.8
20-29	1,989.8	672.0	2,661.8	31.1	32.2	31.4
30-39	1,378.8	411.6	1,790.4	21.6	19.7	21.1
40-49	953.6	313.5	1,267.1	14.9	15.0	14.9
50-59	575.8	164.2	740.0	9.0	7.9	8.7
60-69	284.2	48.1	332.3	4.4	2.3	3.9
70-79	65.6	10.3	76.0	1.0	0.5	0.9
80+	14.9	1.7	16.6	0.2	0.1	0.2

Source: Central Statistics Organization (2018)

Regarding geographical distribution, labor force participation is higher in rural areas, with rates of 54.9 percent. This is a common trend in less developed economies, where educational opportunities are scarce, and most people are engaged in labor-intensive, low-productivity agricultural activities. The labor force participation rate in urban areas is lower, at 48.0 percent for both sexes combined. This is due to the presence of alternative opportunities, such as school attendance, getting sufficient financial resources from parental businesses, and having income sources beyond employment. While the differences in economic participation across residence types follow a similar pattern for men and women, the disparities are much more pronounced for women. Although the rural female labor force participation rate (27.6 percent) is close to the national average of 26.8 percent, nomadic Kuchi women have a participation rate almost twice as high (50.5 percent). In contrast, the rate for urban women is significantly lower (20.5 percent) (see Fig. 3.1 below).

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[4] The Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan defines the working age as 14 years old, a definition that is also adopted in this research (Central Statistics Organization, 2016).
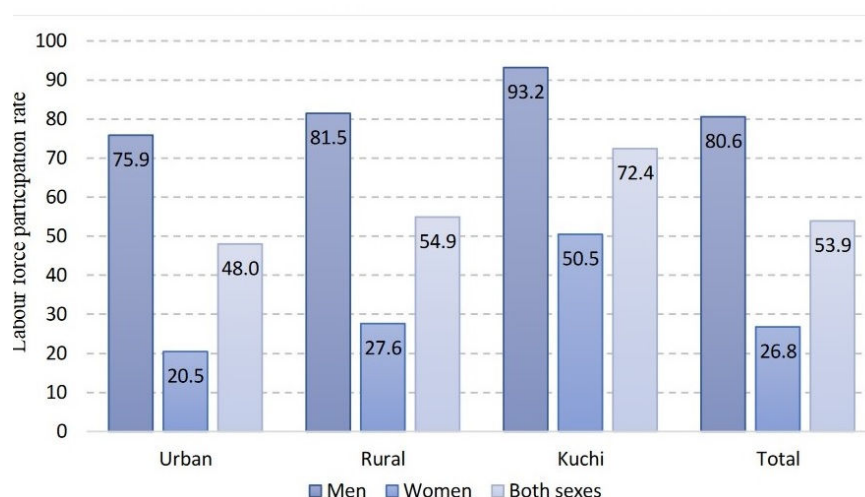
Source: Central Statistics Organization (2018)

The main reason for the variation in participation rates by residence is the economic activity of individuals under the age of 20. In this age group, the largest differences in participation rates are observed, and since it constitutes a significant portion of the total working-age population (24.0 percent), it has a significant impact on the overall picture. Limited access to education for children and young adults, particularly among rural populations compared to urban residents, can explain these differences in labor participation at younger ages (Central Statistics Organization, 2018). Another factor is the greater demand for child labor (Hall, 2011), as demonstrated by the analysis of child labor based on ALCS 2013-14 data; the survey indicated that among urban, rural, and Kuchi children in the working age of 14-17, 24.0, 54.7, and 77.3 percent, respectively, were involved in child labor or were otherwise working (Central Statistics Organization, 2016).

Overall, the labor force participation rates align with relatively high participation among middle-aged adults and low to very low participation among young and older individuals. However, there are substantial gender differences; men's participation rates peak at nearly 100 percent for a broad age range from 30 to 44 years and remain above 95 percent between 25 and 49 years old. In contrast, women's participation rates barely exceed 30 percent and are concentrated in the middle adult age range of 31 to 49 years. Additionally, women's participation shows little variation across age groups until the age of 60-64, when a significant drop occurs (Central Statistics Organization, 2018).

Employment

In households, only a few members are engaged in work. This is mainly due to a noteworthy number of children, as 88 percent of households have children. On average, a household consists of 6.6 individuals, comprising 3.21 adults (aged 18-59), 0.26 elderly (aged 60+), and 3.13 children (below 18). Out of these, only 1.6 members work outside the home, with 1.19 being men, 0.15 women, 0.23 boys, and 0.03 girls. Interestingly, households tend to rely more on children (predominantly boys) for work compared to adult women. The proportion of working men in a household remains relatively constant at about three-quarters as the household size increases. At the same time, the percentage of children decreases from one in six to nearly zero (2 percent) with larger household sizes. The share of working women increases significantly as the household size increases, reaching almost 25 percent (Tzannatos & Violetta, 2023).

Figure 3.2: Distribution of workers within the household by gender and age (Men - are depicted on the left axis, while women and children are shown on the right axis)
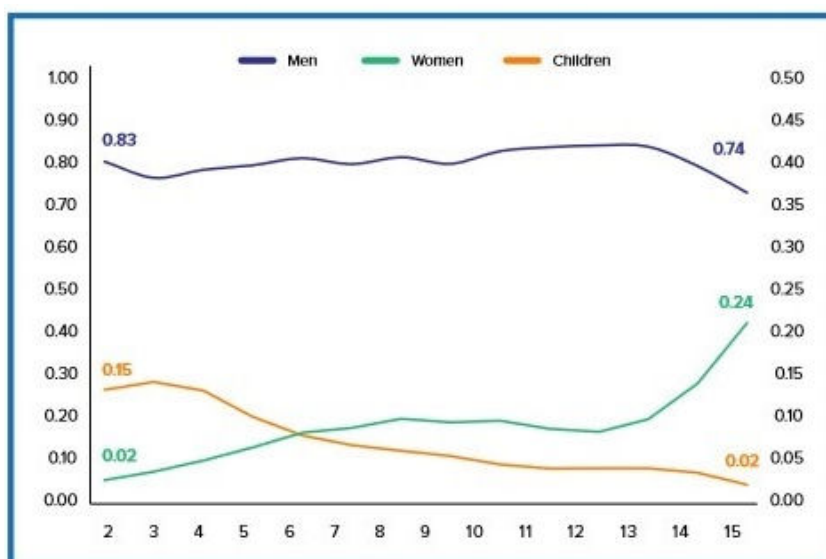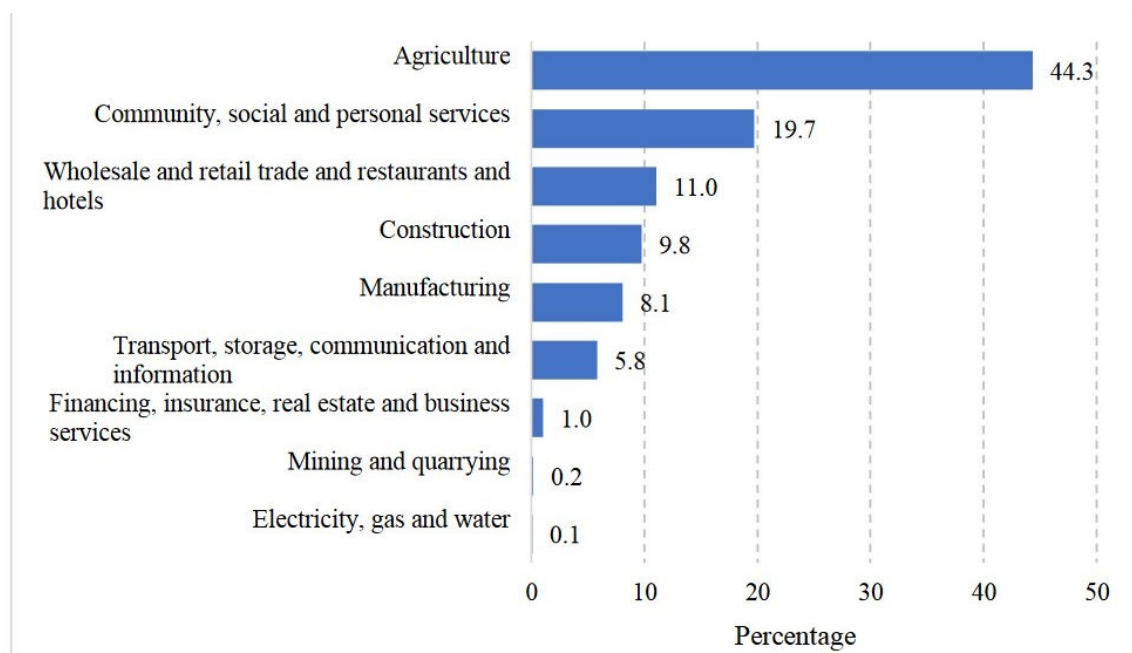

Source: UNDP (2023) derived from data gathered during WAA 2022[5]

Notably, both female-headed and male-headed households have similar proportions of working men among their employed members. However, in female-headed households, the share of working women is ten times higher than in male-headed households (over 40 percent compared to 4 percent). As expected, the number of workers does increase with the size of the household, although not substantially (Humanitarian Data Exchange, 2022). For instance, only one member works in households with two members, but this number rises to just 2.8 in households with 15 members. While households may face challenges related to environmental and seasonal factors, the current dire employment situation is primarily a result of recent political and economic changes. Additionally, the limited participation of women in the labor market significantly impacts households' ability to generate income, alongside the impact of having many children (Tzannatos & Violetta, 2023).

The agricultural sector heavily dominates the employment distribution in Afghanistan. Approximately 45 percent of the employed population, accounting for 2.8 million individuals, work in farming or livestock-related activities. This economic sector is divided equally between farming (23.2 percent of total employment) and livestock production (21.2 percent). The service sector comes second regarding job numbers, employing 19.7 percent of the workforce. Additionally, four other economic sectors stand out in the employment distribution, each covering approximately 6 to 11 percent of the workforce: wholesale and retail trade and restaurants and hotels (mainly retail trade; 10.4 percent of total employment), construction (mostly construction of buildings; 9.2 percent), manufacturing (mainly manufacturing of clothes and textiles; 6.5 percent), and transport, storage, communication, and information (mainly land transport; 5.7 percent). The remaining main economic sectors have minimal visibility in the employment statistics (Central Statistics Organization, 2018). It is essential to acknowledge that a portion of Afghanistan's informal economy, which includes activities related to the drug trade, is typically excluded from official statistical calculations.

[5] Whole of Afghanistan Assessment 2022

Source: Central Statistics Organization (2018)

Clearly, the distribution of employment across economic sectors varies significantly based on residence. Agriculture employs more than half (52.6 percent) of the rural population and, due to their nomadic lifestyle, 80.1 percent of the Kuchi population. On the other hand, urban employment is more diversified, with only 5.5 percent of the working population engaged in agriculture, 12.9 percent in manufacturing, 23.5 percent in trade and restaurant businesses, and 36.5 percent in various services (Central Statistics Organization, 2018).

Gender differences in the employment distribution by economic sector are evident. While overall employment concentrates in a few sectors, it is notable that women's employment is primarily restricted to three main sectors: agriculture, manufacturing, and services. In agriculture, one-third (32.8 percent) of workers are female. However, a notable disparity exists between farming activities and livestock production in the agriculture sector. Only 9.5 percent of workers in farming activities are women, while women make up as much as 58.6 percent of the workforce in livestock production. This indicates a significant differentiation of gender roles in agricultural production in Afghanistan. In 2016 and 2017, in the service sector, women were relatively well represented in medical and education services, accounting for 16.1 and 24.0 percent, respectively. Manufacturing was the only central economic sector with a female majority (64.4 percent). This is particularly evident in manufacturing of clothes and textiles, where women constituted a significant 78.7 percent of the workforce. In the lower sub-sector of textile manufacturing (mainly carpet weaving), women occupied an overwhelming 90.8 percent of the jobs (Central Statistics Organization, 2018).

Figure 3.4: Distribution of economic activity by gender (expressed in percentages).
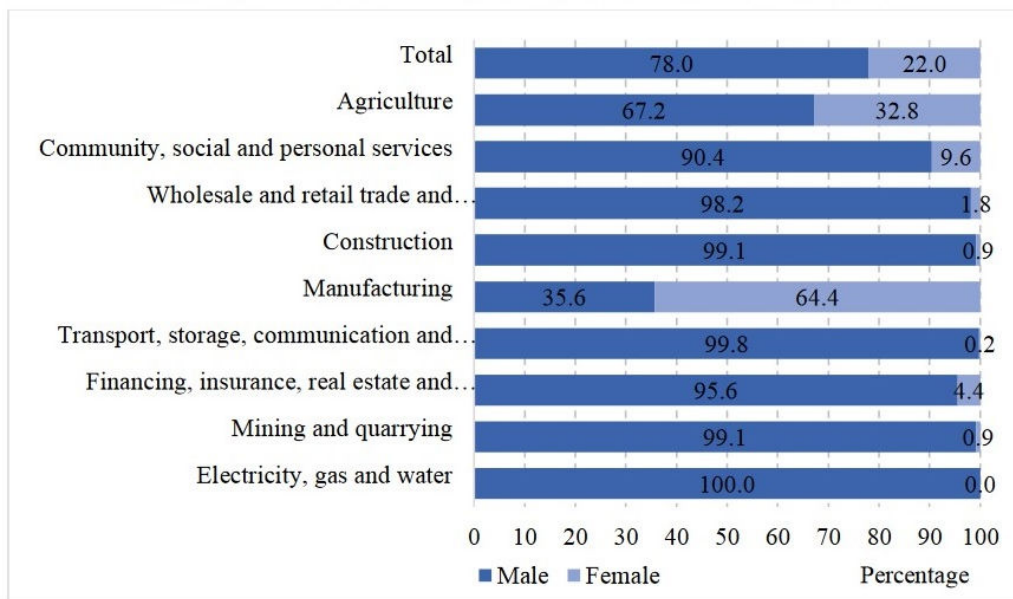
Source: Central Statistics Organization (2018)

Amidst Taliban-imposed constraints on women's employment and education, the proportion of women engaged in the labor market, particularly in education and other public services, has significantly declined. During the preceding Afghan government, approximately 40% of educators were women, and women's representation in the civil service sector peaked at around 27% (Kumar & Noori, 2022). With women's opportunities considerably curtailed in these sectors, this trend indicates a substantial reduction in women's contribution to Afghanistan's service sector and the overall labor market.

Unemployment

Before the Taliban assumed control of the nation in 2021, 2.0 million individuals were classified as unemployed. This encompassed those who were actively seeking employment or those who worked less than eight hours per week. Due to the absence of updated statistics regarding unemployment in Afghanistan, it is plausible that the actual number of unemployed individuals could surpass the figures reported by official institutions. This statistic accounted for 23.9 percent of the total labor force, showcasing the Afghan economy's challenging predicament in fully harnessing its available workforce, leaving almost a quarter of it untapped. Notably, the urban labor force had a slightly higher unemployment rate at 26.5 percent than their rural counterparts. A striking observation is that despite women constituting only one-third of the labor force as compared to men (2.1 and 6.4 million, respectively), the number of unemployed women was nearly equivalent to that of men: 0.9 and 1.2 million, respectively. Consequently, the female unemployment rate soared to more than double that of men, reaching 41.0 percent in contrast to 18.3 percent. One prominent factor contributing to the elevated female unemployment rate was the higher proportion of working women who labored for less than eight hours, thereby qualifying as unemployed (18.4 percent compared to 2.4 percent for men). Even when considering only those who were entirely without work, the unemployment rate for women remained substantially higher than that for men: 28.6 percent versus 16.4 percent, respectively (Central Statistics Organization, 2018).

After the Taliban's assumption of power in August 2021, employment rate in Afghanistan reached its lowest point during the final quarter of that same year (International Labour Organisation, 2023). This

phase witnessed a notable reduction, with an estimated deficit of 540,000 individuals employed when compared to the second quarter of 2021. Additionally, there was a decline of around 690,000 men and women participating in the workforce, as contrasted with a hypothetical scenario where the government remained unchanged (International Labour Organisation, 2023). According to findings from the private sector survey conducted by the World Bank, a significant three-quarters of female workers have experienced job layoffs within the surveyed firms since the commencement of August 2021 (World Bank Group, 2022a).

During the initial half of 2022, a minor amelioration was discernible in the labor market, though it was modest. Nevertheless, this revival predominantly favored adult males who managed to secure employment, often through self-employment opportunities. As late as 2022, the state of employment remained stagnant, culminating in a shortfall of approximately 450,000 workers in the fourth quarter compared to the pre-crisis period. When juxtaposed with the employment figures anticipated without a change in administration, the disparity amounted to a substantial 900,000. The working-age populace bore significant losses due to emigration, contributing to employment stagnation towards the conclusion of 2022. This led to a marked decline in the employment-to-population ratio (EPR), plummeting from 37 percent in the second quarter of 2021 to 33.6 percent in the fourth quarter of the same year. Despite a minor resurgence, the EPR still lingered above 34 percent, indicating a considerable disparity from the levels seen before the administrative transition (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

Figure 3.5: Total employment (millions) and employment-to-population ratio (percent)

Employment losses relative to (hypothetical) no change in administration scenario (millions, left-hand axis)
Employment (millions, left-hand axis)
Employment-to-population ratio (%, right-hand axis)
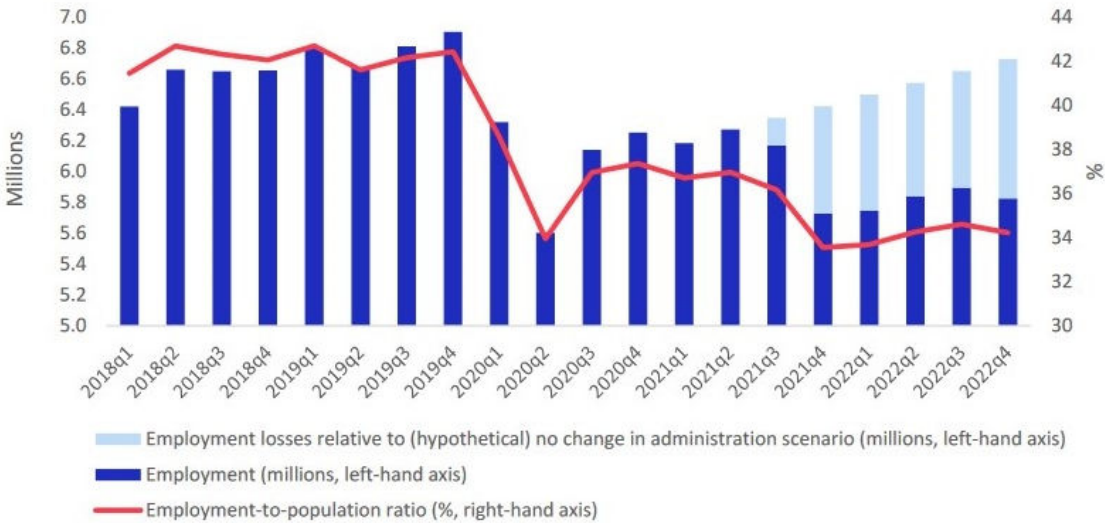
Source: ILO[6] estimates based on Afghanistan Labour Force Survey 2020 and ILOSTAT database.

The recent political change and economic crisis in Afghanistan have significantly impacted labor incomes. The combination of declining wage and salaried employment alongside the increase in self-employment has caused labor income to become more unstable, leading to reduced earnings for many individuals. Based on the findings of the Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey carried out by the World Bank (World Bank Group, 2022b), a considerable 46 percent of all household heads reported a decrease in their earnings.

The crisis in Afghanistan has had a severe and disproportionate impact on young people, particularly those aged 15-24 years. Employment opportunities for the youth have been significantly affected, with

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[6] International Labour Organization

a 25 percent decrease in youth employment during the fourth quarter of 2022 compared to the second quarter of 2021. While total employment showed some modest signs of recovery in the first half of 2022, the employment situation for young men and women continued to decline throughout the year. The economic and political situation, along with the humanitarian crisis, has long-term implications for the country's youthful economy and society. More than 40 percent of the total population in 2022 was under the age of 15 years, and over 20 percent were aged 15-24 years (International Labour Organization, 2023).

The secondary school enrolment and changes in youth labor force participation have put immense pressure on the labor market to absorb young job seekers and retain young workers. A comprehensive study conducted by the World Bank (World Bank Group, 2022c) indicates that the labor force participation rate for young men aged 14-24 years increased from 48 per cent in June–August 2020 to 59 percent during the same period in 2022.

Constraining access to education, especially for adolescent girls and young women, yields immediate and enduring repercussions on their educational and labor prospects within Afghanistan (UN WOMEN, 2022). In the fourth quarter of 2022, female employment plummeted by an estimated 25 percent compared to the second quarter of 2021, pre-crisis. Conversely, men experienced a relatively minor dip of only 7 percent during the same timeframe.

Figure 3.6: Total and female employment (index, 2021Q2 = 100)
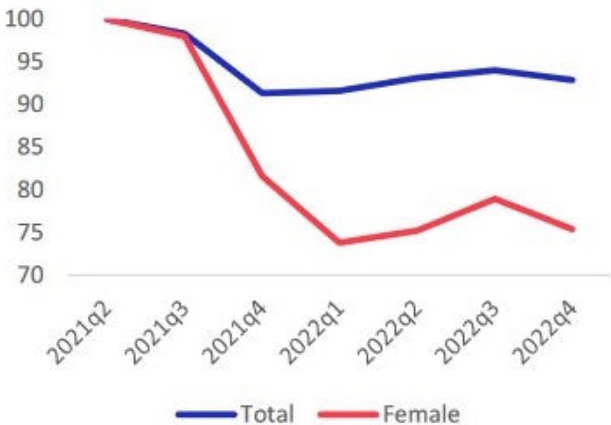
Source: ILO estimates based on Afghanistan Labour Force Survey 2020 and ILOSTAT database.

The recent prohibition on young women's higher education, implemented at the close of 2022, undoes the advancements achieved over the last two decades. The closure of secondary schools for girls resulted in a reduction in enrolment rates among young women aged 14-18. Furthermore, child labour surged, with one out of every four children indicating their involvement in family support through work (World Bank Group, 2022c).

The constrained labor force participation of women, including the youth, can be attributed to sociocultural norms, limited educational and training access, and the burdens of unpaid household and caregiving responsibilities. The mobility and employment restrictions imposed on women subsequent to the change in government may have also prompted some to withdraw from the labor force (International Labour Organization, 2022).

In response to the challenging circumstances, some women turned to self-employed activities such as farming, piece work, or clothes repair to contribute to household income and mitigate further declines in female employment. These activities are often home-based due to the systematic exclusion of women from public life. However, despite these efforts, the employment situation for women remains critical and has been worsened by a recent decree prohibiting women from working in national and international non-governmental organizations (International Labour Organization, 2023).

Research on the Afghan labor market following the Taliban's assumption of power has brought to light a striking reality: a surge in unemployment. While unemployment is a pervasive challenge affecting the entire working-age population of Afghanistan, the plight of women stands out with an unprecedented increase over the past two decades. This crisis finds its roots in a series of events within Afghanistan. The prevailing harsh economic conditions have triggered a loss of employment opportunities, leading to a sharp uptick in the unemployment rate. Notably, within the private sector, approximately seventy-five percent of female employees across various enterprises have found themselves without jobs.

The stringent constraints imposed by the Taliban on women's participation in the workforce, coupled with their limited access to education beyond the home, have left a significant portion of Afghan women jobless. The ban on women's education in universities and schools has compounded this issue, further contributing to the growing ranks of unemployed women of working age. Regrettably, the repercussions of denying women access to education extend beyond mere unemployment, exacerbating the overall poverty rate within the nation. A survey undertaken by the Central Statistics Organization underscores the relation between illiteracy and poverty. Those most affected by poverty are frequently characterized by their lack of education.

Figure 3.7: Percentage figures indicating the poverty rate, proportion within the impoverished populace, and portion within the overall population, categorized by the educational achievement of the household head.
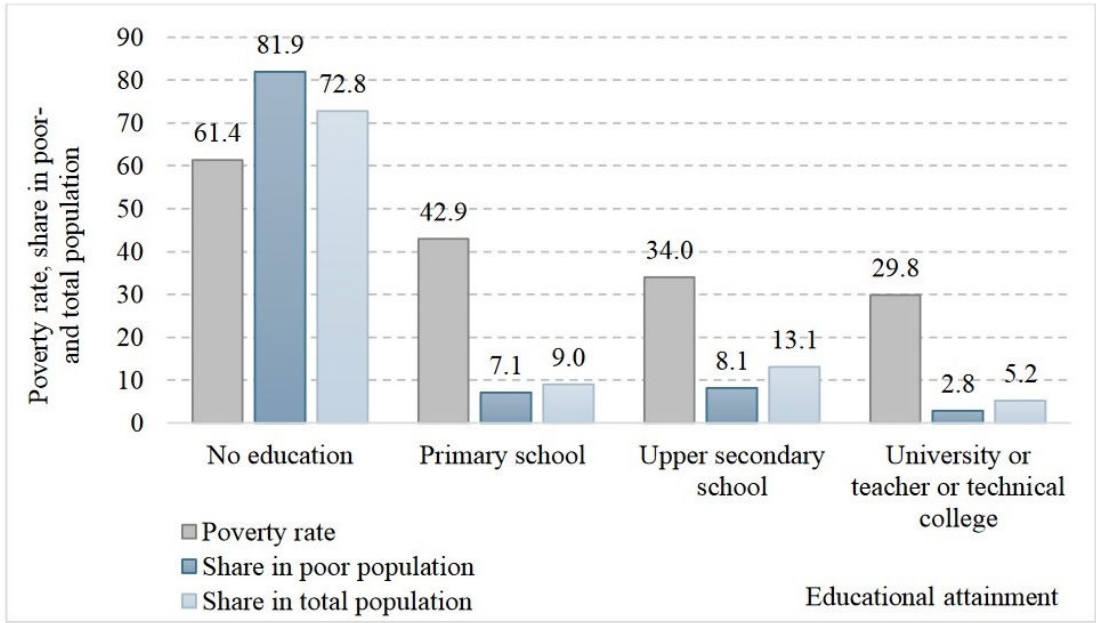
Central Statistics Organization (2018)

As depicted in Figure 3.7, roughly 73 percent of the populace resides in households led by individuals without any formal education. These households constitute a significant majority, comprising 82 percent of the impoverished sector, with an average poverty rate of 61 percent. It's noteworthy that poverty rates tend to decline as the educational attainment of the household head rises; nevertheless,

households whose heads possess education beyond the secondary level make up a mere 5 percent of the total population. It's important to note that even when the household head is educated, the potential for poverty still persists.

The labor market in Afghanistan under Taliban control faces severe challenges due to political instability and economic crisis. Women have been particularly affected by restrictions on education and employment, leading to a dramatic reduction in their labor market participation. Unemployment rates have increased, especially among women, who face barriers to employment due to restrictions imposed by the Taliban. The urban labor force has higher unemployment compared to rural areas, exacerbating the challenges faced by households, particularly those headed by women. The ongoing restrictions and lack of educational opportunities further worsen the economic hardships, leading to increased poverty rates across the nation.

In the next chapter we will refer to our qualitative research and present some insights from expert interviews.

4. Women's Employment Landscape in Afghanistan and the Role of Distance Education

Following the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, women faced substantial limitations on their employment opportunities due to imposed restrictions. Many job options within the Afghan labor market are practically forbidden to them. Currently, educated women are permitted to work only in sectors such as health, education, media, agriculture, small businesses, and handicrafts (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5).

The authorization to work in these sectors signifies that the Taliban have allowed some women to engage in employment out of their homes. It is important to note that despite these constraints, some women continue to work from home in various capacities, including administrative roles. In these cases, the Taliban lack control over their work and are unable to impede them from carrying out their professional activities remotely.

In rural areas, restrictions on the employment of rural women are not severe; women actively participate in the agricultural sector, particularly in saffron cultivation, honey production, and handicrafts. Urban areas also have some employment opportunities for women in small businesses, tailoring, and handicrafts. The Afghan Diaspora across the US, Europe, Canada, and Australia, provides a global market for locally-produced clothing and handicrafts by women within Afghanistan, and this market is continuously expanding. Recently, the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been established in different parts of Afghanistan, initiated with the support of the United Nations Development Program and granted permission by the Taliban government. The establishment of Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry signifies that women can participate in the business sector. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2023), this organization currently supports 34,000 businesswomen in Afghanistan and aims to increase this number to 50,000. Recently, several businesswomen, backed by this organization, took part in an exhibition in Dubai, showcasing a diverse range of products, including jewelry, carpets, dried fruits, handicrafts, shoes, and saffron. Moreover, as the Internet continues to expand, new opportunities have emerged for online work, offering Afghan women the chance to access the local, regional, and international labor markets. Interviewees in this research highlighted diverse opportunities in the

online job market for women. Some women collaborate with international research institutions, engaging in research data collection and conducting telephone interviews (I5). Others are involved in online marketing for various companies. One interviewee named persons who work online as translators for international companies. In the city where she resides, she noted that some students are involved in data entry for an American company (I3).

Despite women's contributions in the fields of health, education, media, and commerce, there are limitations on women's employment in these sectors. Notably, women are currently prohibited from enrolling in universities to study in the mentioned fields. Even those who have graduated from medical programs encounter restrictions under the Taliban government; only women who obtained licenses before the Taliban's rule can continue to practice as physicians. In the education sector, women are restricted to working in elementary schools, and in the media sector, their employment is confined primarily to Kabul. In the provinces, the constraints imposed by the Taliban make women's work in the media nearly impossible. Additionally, the presence of women in small businesses is notably limited and subdued (I5).

The challenges faced by women in employment extend beyond the official restrictions declared by the Taliban. In numerous instances, individuals associated with the Taliban adopt an even more aggressive stance than the group's officially declared policies, imposing personal preferences that hinder women's employment. The work environment for women in Taliban-approved sectors like health and education has become markedly difficult due to the stringent policies of the Taliban's ethical police concerning women's travel between their homes and workplaces. In numerous cases, the Taliban restrict women from traveling to the city unless accompanied by a male relative. Additionally, economic problems have led to the closure of many businesses, exacerbating the issue of women's unemployment (I1, I3, I5).

The viewpoints of our interviewees shed light on two crucial aspects concerning women's employment opportunities in the labor market. Firstly, women's employment in Afghanistan faces numerous challenges, but viable opportunities exist for their active involvement in the labor market and economic activities. Secondly, despite these opportunities, Afghan women still require empowerment to fully engage in the workforce. Over the past two decades, the international community's support for women's empowerment programs has played a pivotal role in their achievements across various sectors, including education and the economy. To sustain the progress made in enhancing women's participation in Afghanistan, it is imperative to address the challenges posed by the Taliban's restrictions on women. This can be achieved through the implementation of distance learning and online training programs aimed at overcoming barriers and by bolstering women's skills to increase their impactful presence in the labor market.

Research on the impact of E-Learning on female students at Samangan University in Afghanistan (Hakimi et al., 2023) concluded that E-Learning significantly enhances academic achievements, overcoming barriers and enriching learning experiences. Positive feedback from students highlights the motivational and engaging aspects of E-Learning. The study underscores the importance of leveraging technology to provide equitable educational opportunities and enhance academic performance. It suggests the need for increased investments in E-Learning infrastructure, particularly in remote areas with limited traditional educational resources. According to this study, comprehensive teacher training is deemed crucial for the effective use of digital tools and collaboration with diverse stakeholders is encouraged to ensure the sustainable implementation of E-Learning initiatives.

The interviewees suggested that online training courses should target both the Afghan labor market and online job opportunities in the regional and global job markets. Given the limited job opportunities for women in Afghanistan, it is advisable to design and implement online training courses covering

various fields such as education, health, journalism, research methods, writing skills development, management skills, accounting, entrepreneurship, small business start-ups, website design, and marketing for agricultural products and handicrafts. Moreover, specific educational courses for Afghan women can be developed to focus on skills required for online jobs in the regional and international labor markets. This includes subjects like computer programming, application development, and applied software, which can enhance women's prospects of securing online jobs (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5).

Ensuring successful implementation of online courses for women in Afghanistan depends on essential prerequisites such as reliable Internet connectivity and access to electricity. Moreover, participants enrolled in courses covering web design, computer programming, application development, and software training for various professions must possess a personal computer. Without this crucial tool, engaging in the practical projects integral to these courses becomes impractical. To meet these conditions, a flexible approach to course delivery is necessary, enabling participants to engage during periods of stable electricity and accommodating potential disruptions affecting one to three individuals per teaching session. Addressing these challenges can involve recording and sharing instructional videos, as well as providing learning resources to students. In the long term, establishing an online educational platform in the form of a dedicated website is essential. Such a platform would enable participants to access educational materials seamlessly, ensuring uninterrupted availability throughout the course (I3). Moreover, over 90% of the Afghan population currently suffers from poverty (Tzannatos & Violetta, 2023). Consequently, a significant number of women face financial constraints that hinder their ability to afford proper internet access for online training courses. To ensure equal opportunities for all women deprived of education to participate in online training, it is essential to cover their monthly internet fees during the training period. The estimated monthly internet fee stands at approximately 30 euros (I1). A number of women, particularly those residing in rural areas without internet access, face significant challenges participating in online training courses. To address this, recorded educational videos and relevant materials can be distributed to them via flash memory and computer storage, enabling self-paced learning. Alternatively, an option is to cover the cost of their internet and stay in cities with internet access, amounting to approximately 100 euros per month (I5). Given that many villagers have connections in urban areas, they can rent suitable accommodations during the training course. This approach mirrors the practice employed by rural students over the past two decades when preparing for Afghanistan's higher education entrance exam, Kankur. During the three-month winter break, students traditionally migrated to cities, enhancing their educational skills through specialized courses, with a particular focus on mathematics and science. One of the alternative options to make training courses accessible to a large number of participants in Afghanistan is to use satellite technology as an educational medium. Distance education through satellite television emerges as a viable alternative to educate women without internet access. Television holds widespread usage in Afghanistan, reaching 68% of the population, including rural areas, as indicated by a survey conducted in 2021 (BBC Media Action, 2021).
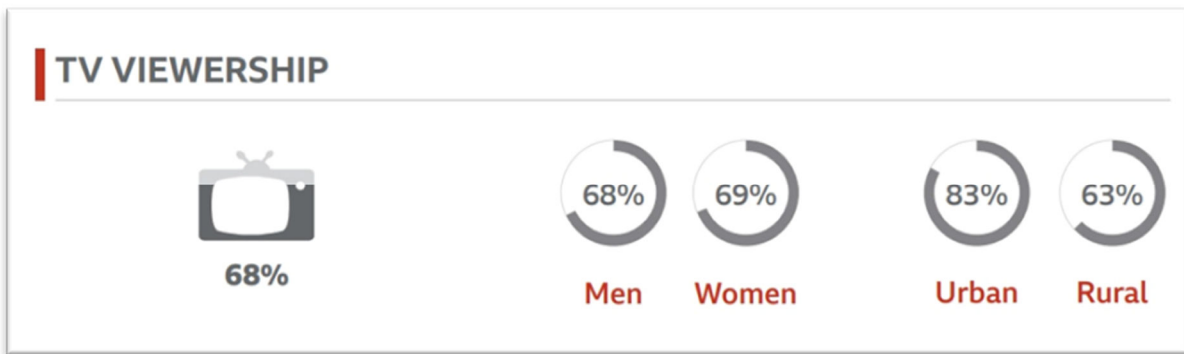
Figure 4.1- Television viewership rate in Afghanistan. Source: BBC Media Action

The process for distance education via television involves recording teaching sessions, preparing them for broadcast in both television and multimedia formats. To disseminate educational content across Afghanistan, making it accessible to all participants, satellite technology is employed for television broadcasting and sending training materials in various formats (text, audio, and video) to students. This technology enables the delivery of digital educational content using a standard home TV satellite set-top box, eliminating the requirement for extra hardware. The educational content will be integrated into a typical TV video stream as .ts files and transmitted through a satellite TV channel (Moon, 2016). Students can record the video stream with their regular satellite TV receiver, transfer it to their smartphone or computer, and utilize an application to decode the video stream into text, audio, or video files for viewing. The Yahsat Satellite Communications Company currently provides this service in the region. Establishing a suitable studio and broadcast center is essential for television production and distributing educational content to students via satellite. This approach ensures widespread access to educational materials throughout the region, enhancing educational opportunities for Afghan women.

Various distance education options aimed at enhancing women's skills and fostering their employment opportunities in Afghanistan provide a viable means to overcome the constraints imposed by the Taliban. These initiatives empower Afghan women to pursue entrepreneurship by acquiring marketable skills or securing employment aligned with their capabilities. Conducting training courses through the mentioned methods demands human and financial resources. Fortunately, over the last two decades, the expansion of education in Afghanistan has led to a significant number of capable Afghan instructors both within and outside the country, qualified to teach in the field of distance education. Therefore, most educational programs can be conducted in Persian and Pashto languages. Moreover, there is a notable number of Afghan women proficient in English who can actively engage in training courses delivered in that language. For these female students, non-Afghan instructors can also contribute by instructing in English.

Training courses can be done according to academic standards regarding subjects and credit requirements. Individuals who successfully complete the training will receive a certificate from a university. Implementing this approach in educational programs can significantly ease the integration of Afghan women into the workforce. Furthermore, the credits they successfully pass may be transferable to bachelor's degree programs at various universities in the future. Therefore, universities are the best qualified institutes to organize these training courses for Afghan women (I1).

Using the management and communication capacity of local educational institutions in Afghanistan for conducting educational courses can enhance their effectiveness and streamline the implementation process. Informing applicants about participation and encouraging their registration,

along with distributing the cost of internet, necessitates local cooperation. While private universities are not able to independently conduct online training courses for girls, they can collaborate with international organizations and universities outside Afghanistan. Additionally, they can play a crucial role in providing human resources by introducing qualified instructors to teach in these educational courses (I1).

The key point regarding online training courses is that it should not be viewed as a long-term solution for the education of women facing deprivation in Afghanistan. Rather, it serves as a temporary measure to address the constraints imposed by the Taliban on Afghan women. Some experts interviewed in this research expressed concern about the acceptance of online education by international institutions as an alternative to formal education. They perceive it as a potential step towards normalizing the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on Afghan women. These interviewees believe that such online training should be regarded as a short-term emergency response rather than a long-term solution. Therefore, they call for increased pressure on the Taliban government to respect women's rights and remove the ban on women's education (I3, I5).

5. Sectors with Potential Employment Opportunities for Afghans, Particularly Women

This chapter uses quantitative evidence to explore the Afghanistan job market and check women's employment opportunities. We use published job offers as a proxy for job opportunities. We do not claim that we can give a full and exact overview about the (legal parts of the) Afghan labour market. But the analysis of job offers of the biggest and most popular digital job portal, Acbar, allows us to estimate whether there are any job opportunities for women. In order to produce more than a single snapshot of the labour market, we observed the job portal for several month (cf. Chapter 3 for details). We mainly try to shed light on the following questions:

1. Are there any job offers for women and if so in what sector?
2. Does the proportion in the previous question change over the time of data collection?
3. What are the rules of education and work experience in relation to gender?
4. What key skills were mentioned as required for a successful hiring?

5.1: Descriptives

The following Table 5.1 presents the description and some key summary statistics of the above observed variables.

Table 5.1: Description of the variables and some key summary statistics

Variable	Description	Summary statistics
Location	Location of the job	Maximum-Kabul City: 860 (41%) Minimum- Panjshir: 4

		Women: Kabul City- 81
Nationality	Afghan or International, Any	International: 6 National: 2006 (97%) Any: 52 Women: National- 307
Job Category	Agriculture, Business, Education, Engineering, Health, IT, Law, Security	Mostly-asked-Business: 1003 (49%) Least asked-Legal: 16 (0.7%) Women: Business - 103
Employment Type	Full time, Part time	Full time: 2018 (98%) Part time: 46 (2%) Women: Full time- 300
Gender	Male, Female, Any	Female: 310 (15%) Male: 518 (25%) Any: 1236 (60%)
Experience- in years	Minimum work experience required	min=0, avg=3.4, max=15, sd=1.9 Women: mean= 2.6 (sd=1.4)
Min. Education	Minimum educational degree required SS: Secondary school HS: High school VD: Vocational degree BA: Bachelor's degree MA: Master's degree PhD: Doctoral degree MD: Medical degree	SS: 21 (1%) HS: 162 (8%) VD: 21 (1%) BA: 1547 (75%) MD: 133 (6%) MA: 144 (7%) None: 36 (1.7%)

Table 5.1 suggests that most of the jobs offered are located in Kabul. Majority of the openings are for Afghan candidates and nearly all positions are full-time. A significant result of the observed frequencies is that only 25% of positions are looking for only male candidates, 15% opened only for female

applicants, the rest are open for both genders. With Taliban's restrictions on women's employment, this result is surprising.

In order to check the variation across time, we have checked the variability of different variables across different rounds of data harvesting.

With the main focus on women's share in the job market, we checked the percentage of job ads exclusively for women across time. Figure 5.1 depicts the distribution with x-axes representing eight different rounds of data collection. Figure 5.1 illustrates that the proportion of jobs open only for females is fairly stable around 15% during several months of observation.
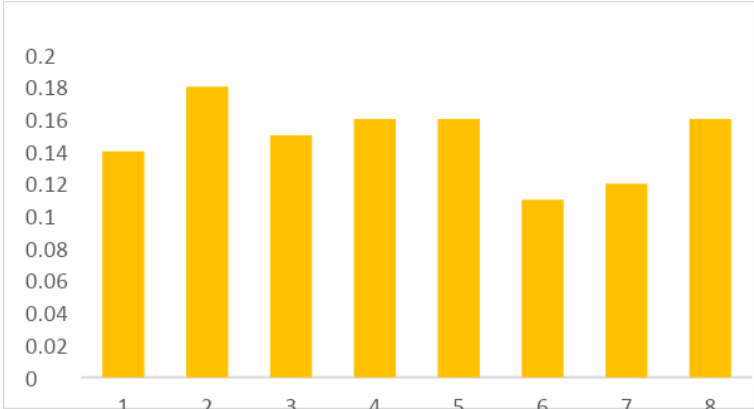

Figure 5.1: Proportion of jobs open only for females

Our data shows that the significance of the health sector for women in terms of labour market opportunities is outstanding. The next Figure 5.2 shows that the proportion of jobs in this sector is also fairly stable at around 23%. The health sector is the one where the proportion of female exclusive jobs is predominant.
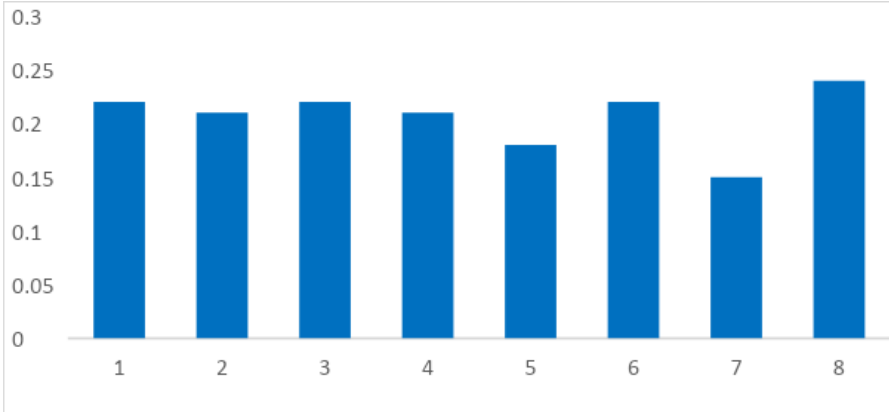

Figure 5.2: Proportion of jobs in the health sector

During several months there is some dynamic in the health-related job offers. Figure 5.3 suggests a relatively high variation of the proportion across eight different rounds.
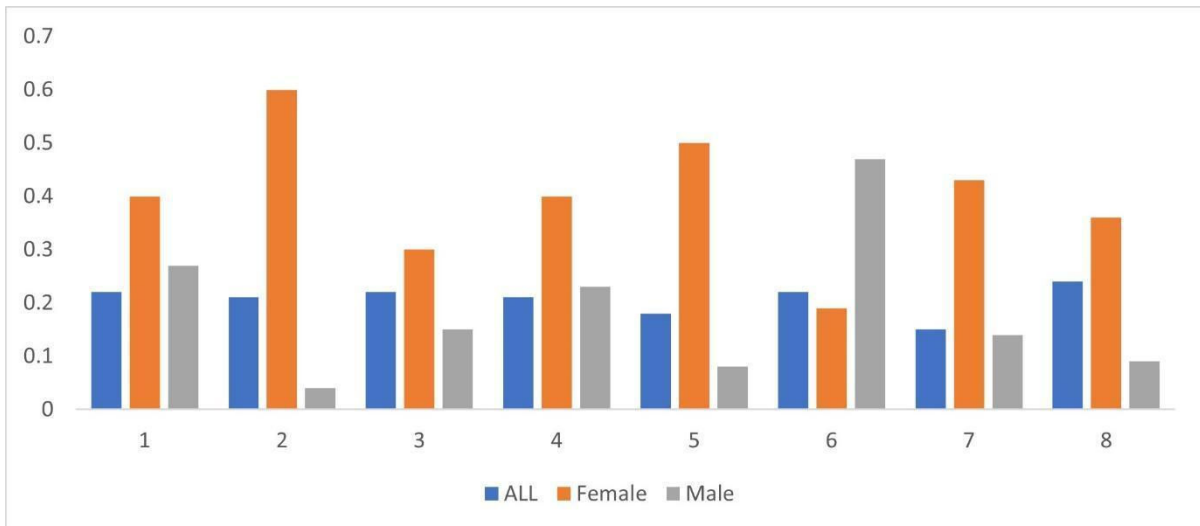
Figure 5.3: Proportion of jobs in the health sector based on Gender

According to our data part-time job offers are very rare in Afghanistan. Based on statistics on the types of jobs (Full/Part time), the percentage of full time offers remains above more than 90% throughout our data collection period (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Proportion of full time jobs

5.2 - Analysis:

In this Subsection, we will have a deeper look at the data on different variables.

When it comes to successful hiring, relevant job experience is one of the main factors. Looking at the distribution of the working experience required (Figure 5.5), it is evident that about 90% of the jobs require 5 years or less working experience and 50% require at least 3 years of working experience.
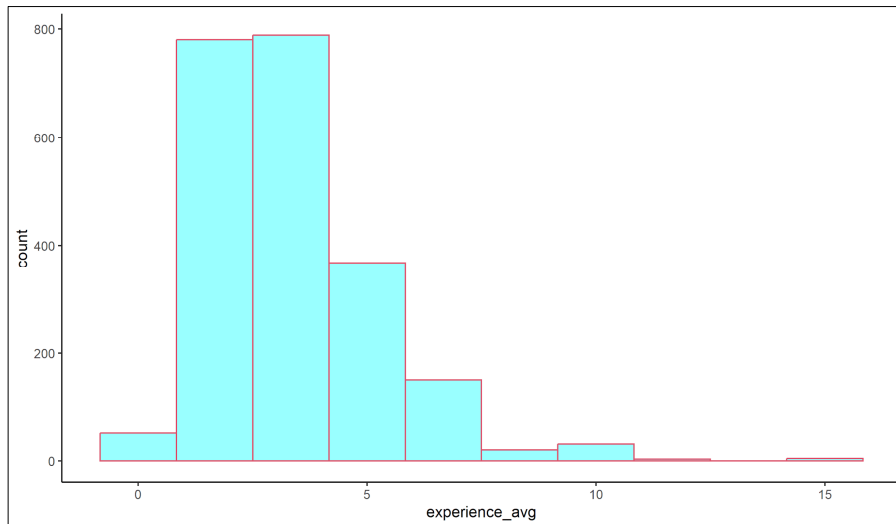
Figure 5.5: Minimum working experience required (in years)

A leading concern, in the face of the current reality in Afghanistan, is the exploration of the association of different variables with gender. This will allow one to better understand the job opportunities for women and how possible interventions could improve their chances. To that end we have explored the association of Gender with Job Category, Education and Experience requirements.

Understanding which job categories are exclusively for female candidates, which ones are open only to male candidates, and which ones are for both genders gives a clear idea of which measures can support women's employment. To that end we construct a joint frequency table to study the association of Gender and Job Category. Table 5.3 depicts the joint distribution of Gender and the Job Category.

Table 5.3: Joint distribution of Gender and Job Category

	Agriculture	Business	Education	Engineering	Health	IT	Law	Security	Others
Female	3 (7.5%)	103 (10.3%)	15 (15.15%)	4 (4.6%)	155 (36.4%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (6.2%)	1 (2.3%)	27 (8.8%)
Male	9 (22.5%)	227(22.6%)	42(42.4%)	37 (42.5%)	88 (20.6%)	12 (27.3%)	4 (25%)	22 (51.2%)	77 (25.2%)
Any	28 (70%)	673 (67.1%)	42 (42.4%)	46 (52.9%)	183 (43%)	31 (70.4%)	11 (68.7%)	20 (46.5%)	202 (66%)
Total	40	1003	99	87	426	44	16	43	306

Table 5.3 suggests that there is a high demand exclusively for female candidates in the health sector. Furthermore, the business-sector is also of very importance for women. In sum, the health sector and the business-sector represent more than 80% of the job offers that are exclusively offered for women. Figure 5.6 illustrates the proportions of female-exclusive jobs in the different labour-market sectors.
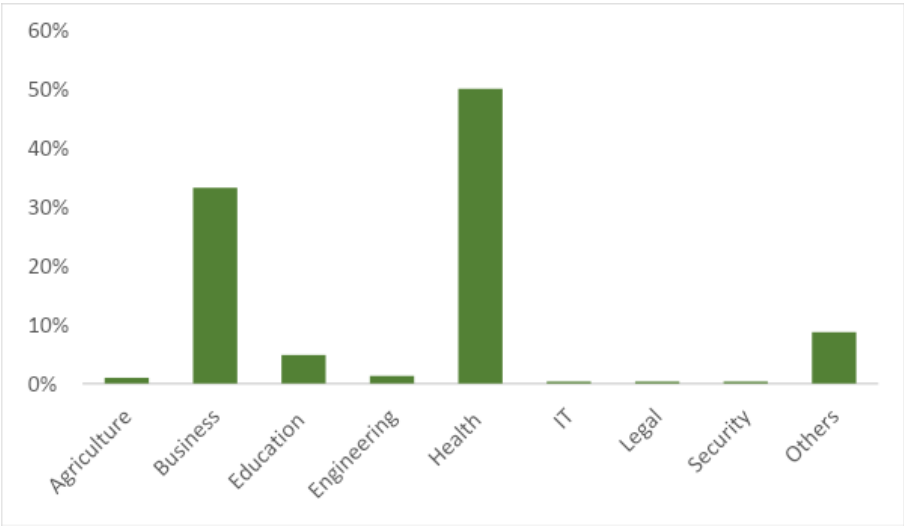

Figure 5.6: Proportion of females exclusive jobs across sectors

In sectors like Agriculture, Engineering, and Security demands for male candidates dominate. There are surprisingly little job offers exclusively for women in the education sector. Only around five percent of all job offers that are exclusively for women are located in the educational sector.

If the focus were on supporting female employment, we need to look at the competition area, where either gender can assume the position.

Next, we explore the association of gender and minimum education requirements. Understanding this association is especially important because of the Taliban's restrictions on women's education---it is becoming increasingly harder for them to fulfill the education requirement. Figure 5.7 shows the association of gender and minimum education requirement.
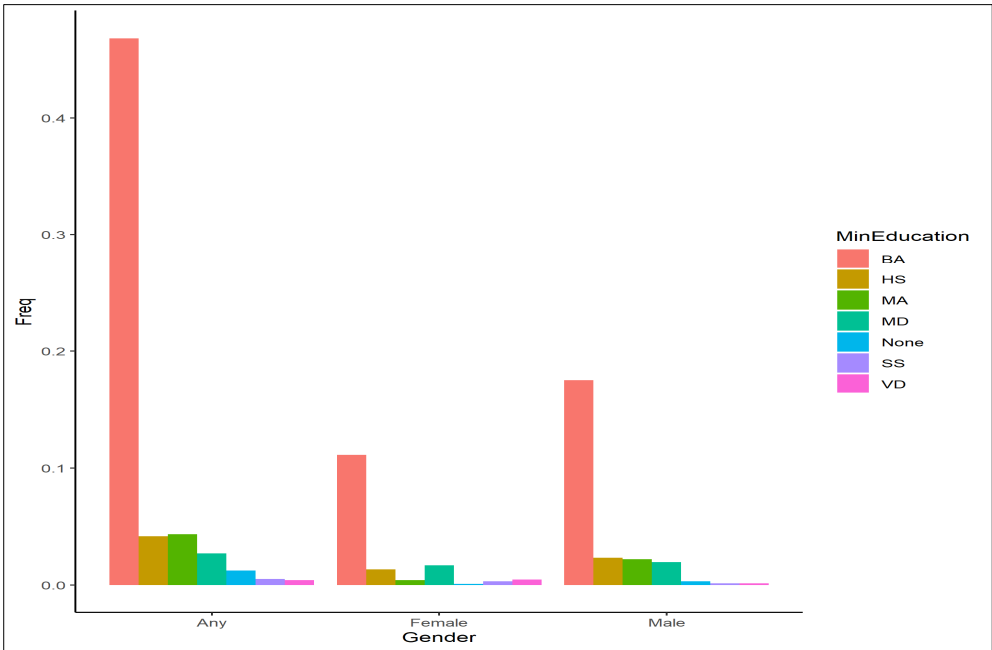

Figure 5.7: Association of Gender and Minimum Education

Figure 5.7 suggests that a bachelor degree is widely asked also for the female candidates (which is the same also for males) followed by a medical degree, which, referring to the significance of the health sector, is obvious.

If gender is not expressed in the job offers, a Bachelor's degree is clearly the dominant minimum education requirement. This is of course a direct effect of the selected data source Acbar. The next important dimension is the required working experience. Working experience is something that cannot be acquired via training. Hence it is relatively harder to facilitate this requirement through a third-party intervention---for instance. To understand the association of gender and minimum work experience required, we employed an F-test and compared the mean standard deviation of the work experience across different Gender categories. The following table presents the summary of our analysis.

Table 5.4: Required working experiences in years by gender category

	Min	Mean	Median	Standard	95th Percentile
Female	0	2.6	2	1.4	5
Male	0	3.3	3	1.9	6.6
Any	0	3.6	3	2	7

Table 5.4 suggests that on average the positions for female candidates require significantly less work experience and based on the standard deviations, this requirement does not vary much across these positions. The 95th percentile confirms a much lower work experience requirement for jobs exclusive to female candidates. Here too, one has to pay a particular attention to the "Any" area. The average work experience required in this area is significantly higher than that of the "Female" group. This can be a bigger obstacle towards female employment in the long run.

Another factor that can be key for designing supportive measures is the understanding of the key skills required for the advertised positions. To come up with a list of frequently asked key skills, we have analyzed the collected data—which are in the form of text – on key skills. Due to the fact that the data is in the form of text, we have employed text mining to transform it into a structured form. From the total 2199 observations (job ads), 595 (98 female, 84 male, 413) of them contain the key skills data. Applying text mining analysis on information on key skills, we have discovered the most frequently asked skills. Figure 5.8 depicts the top 15 most frequently asked key skills.
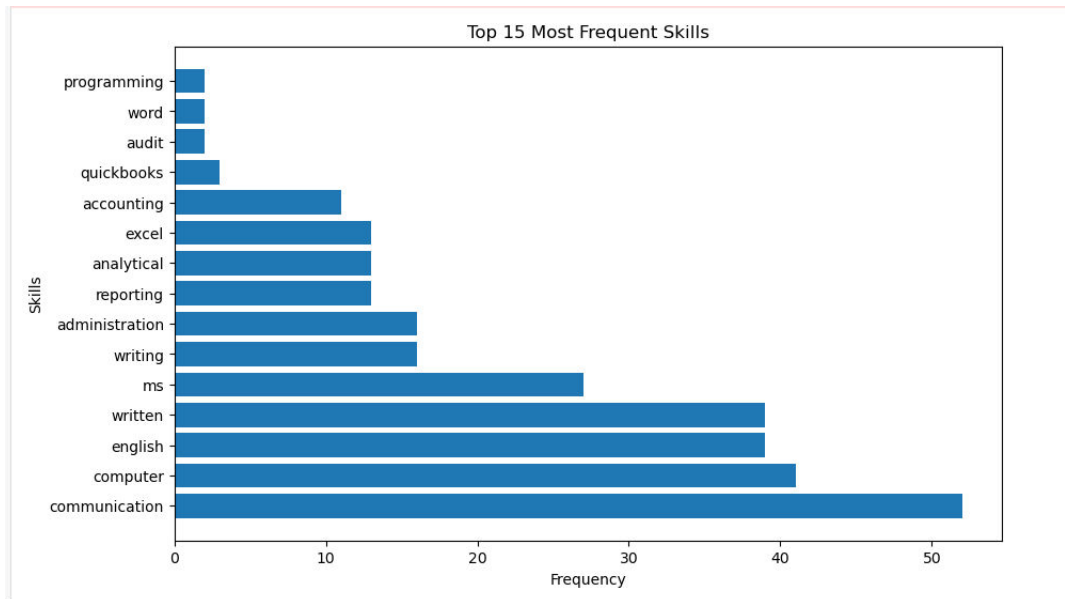
Figure 5.8: Frequently asked Key Skills

Figure 5.8 suggests that communication skill is the most widely asked skill. Writing skills (also coded as *Written*), computer skills--especially office programs, accounting, including QuickBooks and auditing skills are also favorite skills. To understand the key skills required for the jobs exclusively for females/males, we have looked at them separately. Figure 5.9 presents the key skills asked for jobs exclusively for females.
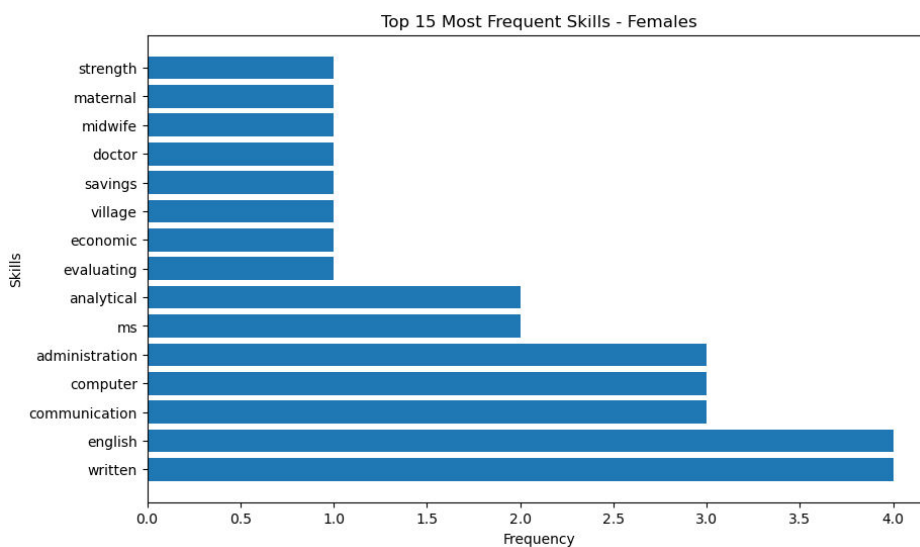
Figure 5.9: Frequently asked Key Skills: Females

Based on Figure 5.9, English language skills, communication, and computer skills are among the widely required skills for females' exclusive jobs. Furthermore, analytical skills, ability to work in rural areas, possessing a medical and nursing degree are also among the key requirements.

For the men on the other hand the set of required skills is different. Communication skills are the most widely asked skills. English language skills, accounting, reporting, and analytical skills are also frequently asked. Moreover, driver positions typically are meant for male candidates. Figure 5.10 presents the most asked skills for the positions exclusive to males.

Figure 5.10: Frequently asked Key Skills: Males

After giving an overview about gender-related job offers in Afghanistan on the basis of the job portal Acbar, we will present a brief discussion part.
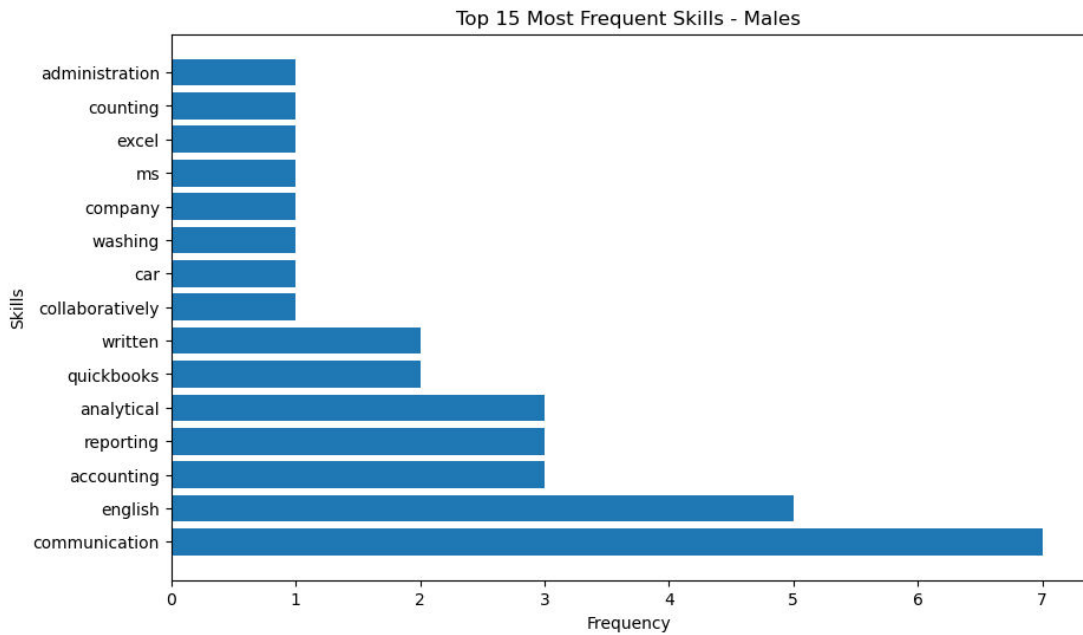
6. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that the Taliban have imposed extensive gender discrimination against Afghan women. The education of girls above the sixth grade is prohibited, and women are denied access to higher education. Most employment opportunities are limited for them. Despite these restrictions, there are still opportunities for women's employment in the labor market of Afghanistan and the region. Since the existence of these employment opportunities appears contradictory to the portrayal in the public media regarding the removal of Afghan women from the public arena, it is necessary to clarify that the existing opportunities for women's employment are highly fragile. The prohibition of women's education gradually leads to their transformation into unskilled human resources. In other words, if women are not empowered through alternative educational options, they cannot enter the labor market and benefit from the available employment opportunities. Furthermore, the expansion of Internet access has increased the possibility of working from home for Afghan women. By utilizing these facilities, women actively resist the Taliban and attempt to cross their restrictions at the lowest cost. However, the constraints imposed on women's education and work by the Taliban cannot be considered completely resolved. Afghan women have abnormal lives under the rule of the Taliban.

The aim of this research is to identify employment opportunities for women in Afghanistan. Through interviews with Afghan experts, we found out that the online job market, both regionally and internationally, offers significant potential for the employment of Afghan women. However, a

comprehensive understanding of remote employment capacities for Afghan women in the regional and international labor market requires further research. This research reveals that Afghan women can overcome the restrictions imposed by the Taliban and enhance their employment prospects by acquiring the necessary skills for remote and online jobs. Therefore, it is advisable to organize training courses to empower Afghan women through education. The skills gained from such courses would be valuable in both the traditional job market of Afghanistan and the online job market, not only within the country but also regionally and internationally.

The findings of this research depict the current state of Afghan women in the country's labor market. The Taliban's conduct towards women is unpredictable; restrictions on women may either expand or decrease. Recently, the Taliban have become stricter regarding women's clothing, even arresting some who, in their view, did not adhere to proper Islamic dress code(AP, 2024). Such actions indicate that the Taliban's discriminatory policy against women may be enforced more severely. Whether the existing restrictions on women persist or reduce, empowering women through training programs will significantly contribute to enhancing their employment prospects.

If the Taliban persists in gender discrimination against women in Afghanistan, their exclusion from the job market would be considered an extraordinary challenge from both a humanitarian and human rights perspective. Addressing this exceptional problem requires unique and exceptional solutions including providing educational and empowerment services. In the long run, limited educational courses are insufficient as a solution for the Afghan women. An effective strategy to promote women's higher education necessitates offering conventional academic programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, enabling them to obtain valid educational diplomas upon graduation. By leveraging available communication technology capacities, such as the internet and satellite TVs, it is possible to provide educational services for a large number of women deprived of education in Afghanistan. The Taliban's ban on women's education in Afghanistan is an unprecedented event. Overcoming this challenge and facilitating women's access to education demand flexible methods and approaches— options that may not be ideal but are currently the only viable ones.

7. Conclusion

The limited participation of women in the Afghan labor market has been a significant challenge over the past half-century. From 2002 until the collapse of the republican system, during which the international community, particularly the United States, the European Union, and other supporting countries, provided substantial financial aid to Afghanistan, women constituted approximately 25% of the country's workforce. In addition to insufficient employment opportunities and traditional values constraining women's presence in the labor market, the low professional capacity of women in terms of the skills required in the Afghan labor market has been one of the major obstacles to their engagement. One indicator of this is the high participation of rural women in the labor force compared to their urban counterparts. This difference arises because working in rural areas typically demands simpler skills, whereas the urban labor market necessitates skills often acquired through a more modern education. Despite the relatively good effectiveness of women's empowerment programs implemented with the support of the international community, they have not succeeded in reducing the gender gap in employment to an acceptable level.

Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, there has been an unprecedented increase in unemployment. The rate of unemployment among women has disproportionately increased

compared to men, exemplified by the loss of employment for three-quarters of women in private enterprises. Women's unemployment has been primarily driven by two factors: the Taliban's extreme gender discrimination against them and the economic crisis that emerged following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. By prohibiting the education of girls above the sixth grade and banning female students from universities, the Taliban effectively dismissed women employed in the education sector. Furthermore, the ban on Afghan women working in foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Afghanistan further contributed to female unemployment. Additionally, restrictions such as the mandate for women to be accompanied by a male family member while traveling and enforcing stringent Hijab regulations have also played a role in increasing the unemployment rate among women. Alongside the Taliban's gender discrimination, the economic crisis that unfolded in Afghanistan post-August 2021 led to the closure of numerous businesses operating in both the manufacturing and service sectors, resulting in the unemployment of many women primarily employed in these areas.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women's work, the findings of this research indicate that there are still employment opportunities for women in Afghanistan's labor market. There is demand for women to work in agriculture, business, education, engineering, health, information technology, clerical work, legal services, research, accounting, marketing, and project management. According to the findings of this research, 15% of these employment opportunities are only for women. Therefore, the level of competition for these special employment opportunities is relatively low due to their allocation to women, and women only compete with each other to secure them. A significant portion of job opportunities is not gender-specific. To succeed in obtaining them, women must compete with male applicants who have had more opportunities to improve their capacity in traditional Afghan society than women, giving them a higher chance of employment. The restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women's education have had a negative impact on their ability to compete with men in obtaining employment opportunities, making success in this sector very challenging for women. Despite the progress made in the last twenty years, Afghanistan's educational system does not align well with the demands of the Afghan labor market in terms of skill development. As a result, many Afghan university graduates, particularly female graduates, must seek additional skills to enhance their employability and chances of success in the workforce.

Many women who have lost their jobs due to the Taliban's oppressive policies, particularly those who were employed in the education sector and are now unemployed because of the closure of girls' schools and the prohibition of women's education in universities, must acquire skills that align with the job opportunities present in the labor market. This necessitates an improvement in their capacity through training, enabling them to secure employment in Afghanistan's labor market and region.

Online training courses for Afghan women should be seen as a temporary solution to the restrictions imposed by the Taliban, not a permanent strategy. There is a concern that the international community might consider online education as an alternative to traditional education, which could normalize the Taliban's restrictions on Afghan women.

8. Recommendations for Educational Offers for Afghan Females under Challenging Circumstances

After the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan has been widely regarded as one of the most challenging countries for women. Beyond the restrictive measures imposed by the Taliban, their unprecedented limitations on women's work and economic activities stand out as particularly challenging. With Afghanistan witnessing the highest levels of gender discrimination, Afghan women now need support in various forms more urgently than ever before. This research highlights specific recommendations for supporting women's employment through professional training. Hence, we propose a set of recommendations focusing on the implementation of professional training for Afghan women, addressing aspects such as management, access, and the content of training programs.

1. Management

Developing Targeted E-Learning Courses

Planning and implementing comprehensive online training programs tailored for sectors where women are permitted to work, or to build capacity for hybrid jobs in the region and internationally. This includes health, education, media, agriculture, small businesses, computer programming, and online marketing.

Funding for Online Professional Trainings

There are sufficient Afghan and non-Afghan instructors available to conduct professional training courses both within and outside Afghanistan, and their expertise can be utilized in online education. The primary limitation in this scenario is the insufficient financial resources to cover internet fees and laptop price for low-income participants and instructors' compensation. It is recommended to allocate adequate funds to support the implementation of the aforementioned training courses.

Certification Offer

Participants completing courses should receive recognized credentials for employment purposes or further education.

Learning Management System (LMS)

Delivering training courses to a large number of diverse populations in various subjects requires a suitable Learning Management System (LMS) to effectively manage and track online training. It is crucial to ensure that the training platform is user-friendly, with a straightforward navigation structure and an intuitive interface for both trainers and participants. Additionally, optimizing the training platform for popular devices, including laptops, tablets, and smartphones, is essential.

2. Access

Bridging the rural-urban divide

Access to online educational infrastructure, including internet and electricity, is comparatively limited in rural areas compared to urban areas. To ensure equitable access to educational courses, it is essential to provide rural participants with a small solar panel, rechargeable battery, and a laptop, in addition to covering the internet fees.

Expanding Access via Satellite TV

Some rural areas in Afghanistan lack Internet access. With adequate financial resources, a more effective approach would be to record training sessions and subsequently broadcast them through satellite TV. This would extend the reach of training programs to a broader audience.

3. Content

Generally, it is advisable to align training courses with the job opportunities present in the Afghan labor market, as well as remote and online work options within the regional and international employment landscapes. This approach aims to enhance women's employment prospects. Here some courses are recommended to empower women in employment:

No	Course title	Justification
1	Computer programming	Computer programming is a highly sought-after skill in the Afghan, regional, and international labor markets. Afghan women can participate in global coding projects, offer freelance programming services, and collaborate with international clients, leveraging their programming skills for remote work.
2	Application development	Application development is a skill in demand in the local job market and globally. Afghan women can take advantage of online platforms to offer their services as freelance app developers, participating in international projects and collaborating with clients from around the world.
3	Website designing	Website designing skills allow Afghan women to support local businesses in creating and maintaining their websites. With the rise of remote work, website designers are in demand globally. Afghan women can offer their services on online platforms, working with clients from different countries.
4	Entrepreneurship Fundamentals	Afghan women equipped with entrepreneurship skills can establish their businesses, contributing to job creation and economic growth within their communities.
5	Digital marketing for small businesses	Digital marketing skills enable Afghan women to support local businesses in promoting their products or services online, contributing to the growth of the local economy. Afghan women can offer their digital marketing services online, working with clients from different regions.

6	Small business management	Small business management skills empower Afghan women to establish and run successful small businesses, contributing to local economic development and job creation.
7	Teaching method	Proficiency in teaching methods is crucial for female educators engaged in homeschooling, especially when instructing girls who have been barred from formal education, hidden from the scrutiny of the Taliban. Afghan women with expertise in teaching methods can enhance online education platforms by crafting instructional content, designing courses, and offering training to Afghan girls.
8	Research method	A significant number of women, who previously served as university professors, have had their academic activities prohibited by the Taliban. Nonetheless, they can engage in active research and establish collaborations with research institutions outside of Afghanistan, particularly in the field of social science research. Teaching research methods, while enhancing their research skills, also boosts their employment prospects.
9	SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)	SPSS is valuable in research, social sciences, and academia, increasing employability in roles that involve statistical analysis and data interpretation.
10	Project management fundamentals	Project management skills are essential for coordinating tasks and projects in various sectors, increasing employability in project-oriented roles.
11	Office administration and management	Proficiency in office administration is crucial for roles in various organizations, including NGOs, and private businesses, enhancing employability in administrative positions.
12	Digital journalism and multimedia storytelling	Afghan women skilled in digital journalism can offer multimedia storytelling services online, contributing to digital media outlets, podcasts, and online video platforms, broadening their employment prospects in the online media sector.
13	Investigative journalism	Investigative journalism skills are essential for uncovering and reporting on critical issues, increasing employability in roles requiring in-depth research and reporting.
14	AutoCAD (Computer-Aided Design)	Proficiency in AutoCAD is indispensable in various industries such as architecture, engineering, and construction, enhancing employability in roles requiring design and drafting skills.Afghan women skilled in AutoCAD can offer remote drafting and design

		services globally, expanding their employment prospects in the online design and drafting sector.
15	QuickBooks	Proficiency in widely used accounting software like QuickBooks is valuable for businesses in Afghanistan, increasing employability in roles that require hands-on experience with this tool.
16	Health education and promotion	Expertise in health education and promotion is essential for roles focused on community health improvement, increasing employability in healthcare settings and community-based organizations.
17	English Language	English proficiency is a key requirement for many job opportunities in Afghanistan, especially in international organizations, businesses, and educational institutions, enhancing employability in various sectors. It increases eligibility for scholarship programs, facilitating opportunities for Afghan women to study abroad.

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