

WOMEN FOR AFGHAN WOMEN

# TRANSFORMING AFGHANISTAN



WAW clients, Afghanistan  
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**W**omen for Afghan Women (WAW) is the largest women's organization in Afghanistan, with over 750 local Afghan staff working tirelessly to empower women and girls, and to build a nation of advocates and allies for women's rights. Working with strategic partners, local stakeholders, and the Afghan government, WAW's ultimate goal in Afghanistan is to transform cultural norms of violence and oppression into those of peace and equality.

Afghan women have made tremendous strides and measurable progress since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Yet, much

**The vast majority of WAW's clients are women and girls who have suffered abuse and human rights violations, including:**

- forced and/or underage (child) marriage;
- so-called "honor" killings and attempts;
- domestic violence;
- ba'ad (custom of using young girls as barter to settle disputes);
- beatings amounting to torture;
- forced prostitution;
- imprisonment for so-called "moral crimes;"
- limited access to healthcare; and
- denial of education.

**"Many around the world have expressed concern for the state of Afghan women. Some have initiated programs to address their problems and to elevate their suffering. But very few have been able to tackle the situation with the understanding and dedication, the wisdom, and the patience of Women for Afghan Women."— Her Excellency, First Lady of Afghanistan, Rula Ghani**

more work needs to be done to expand WAW's reach in Afghanistan and multiply women's gains to accelerate the cultural change needed to advance the country in general, and women's equality and rights in particular.

## WAW'S WORK IN AFGHANISTAN

WAW's work in Afghanistan confronts numerous cases of violence against women and girls, with over 4,000 individuals coming into WAW's centers and shelters every year in the 14 provinces in which the organization operates. Since establishing the first Family Guidance Center in Kabul in 2007, WAW has sought to bridge gaps in the country's social and legal systems. This approach has allowed WAW to successfully assist

hundreds of thousands of Afghans through a wide-ranging set of comprehensive and complementary programs and services.

Among other services, WAW's operations offer refugee assistance, legal aid, mediation, emergency medical care, long-term protective shelters for women and children, and extensive human rights trainings.

WAW's success has been rooted in its grassroots approach in the development and implementation of its programs. WAW always hires locally and uses a bottom-up approach, local knowledge, and a deep understanding of and sensitivity to local culture, traditions, customs, and challenges. Pragmatically, this approach and operational model has manifested into the following core programs and services in Afghanistan:



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**“The education I received from Women for Afghan Women was the only way I could rescue myself and my daughter from violence.”**

— Former WAW women’s center client

- **12 FAMILY GUIDANCE CENTERS**

provide family counseling, mediation, legal representation, and psychological support to persons at risk or that have suffered any form of abuse or human rights violations;

- **12 WOMEN’S PROTECTION CENTERS,**

also known as women’s shelters, provide women and girls safe shelter and support services, legal assistance, as well as life skills, empowerment, and vocational training until the resolution of their legal cases;

- **4 CHILDREN’S SUPPORT CENTERS**

provide safe shelter, stability, loving care, and education for orphans and children whose mothers are in prison;

- **3 TRANSITIONAL HOUSES**

provide women transitioning out of prison with safe shelter, legal assistance, psychological support, as well as life skills, empowerment, and vocational training;

- **1 HALFWAY HOUSE**

provides safe shelter, legal assistance, psychological support, as well as life skills, empowerment, and vocational training to women transitioning out of WAW shelters and who cannot safely return home;

- **WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN**

**RIGHTS TRAINING PROGRAM** provides training on women’s rights under Islamic (or Shari’a) and Afghan Law for individuals at every level of Afghan society. Trainings aim to transform cultural norms and traditions that perpetuate violence against women,

and are conducted in the majority of provinces where WAW operates;

- **PROTECTION AND MONITORING**

**PROJECT** supports local community reintegration efforts for conflict-induced displaced persons and refugee returnees in Afghanistan by strengthening the monitoring and efficacy of protection environments, such as refugee camps;

- **MEN’S MOVEMENT PROGRAM**

develops training materials and workshops for men that challenge norms and attitudes detrimental to women and girls, while remaining culturally sensitive, to ensure enduring and extensive support for women’s rights in Afghanistan; and

- **1 ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS**

in Kabul oversees WAW’s entire Afghanistan operations.

## THE STATE OF AFGHAN WOMEN

Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women and girls. Due to decades of armed conflict, entrenched patriarchal traditions, and a lack of education, widespread violence and systemic discrimination against Afghan women and girls cut across social, political, education, and economic strata.

## BEFORE WAW

**90%** of WAW clients had been victims of violence

**81%** did not know how to read or write

**95%** of children of women prisoners were incarcerated with their mothers

With a resurgent Taliban, a faltering economy, and other endemic challenges, the lack of security across Afghanistan today not only threatens the rehabilitation of the country, but also the advancement of Afghan women and girls. Instability, combined with the prevalence of conservative attitudes, limits women’s abilities to participate equally at all levels of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social life. Additionally, women continue to suffer from severe gender-based violence, both in conflict situations and in their domestic lives.

**“Women for Afghan Women is the best organization in Afghanistan.”** — Fawzia Koofi, Afghan Member of Parliament and Vice President of the National Assembly

Each year, thousands of Afghan women and girls are subject to early and forced marriages, domestic violence, kidnapping, harassment, and intimidation. Families in rural villages often sell their daughters to escape desperate conditions or settle blood feuds between families.

## WAW’S PARTNERS IN AFGHANISTAN

WAW works closely with the Afghan government and the United States (U.S.) State Department, including the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Afghan Ministry of Women’s Affairs, and the Office of Afghanistan’s First Lady. Other partners include the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, United Nations (U.N.) Women, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. WAW is also a proud member of the U.S. Afghan Women’s Council, the Alliance in Support of the Afghan People, the Afghan Shelter Network, and the Afghan Women’s Network.

For information on how to support WAW or to learn more about WAW’s other programs, please visit: [womenforafghanwomen.org](http://womenforafghanwomen.org)

**WOMEN FOR AFGHAN WOMEN (WAW)** is a grassroots civil society organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of disenfranchised Afghan women and girls in Afghanistan and New York (NY). In particular, WAW works to help Afghan women and girls exercise their rights to pursue their individual potential to self-determination, and to representation in all areas of life—political, social, cultural, and economic. WAW relentlessly advocates for women’s rights and challenges the norms that underpin gender-based violence to influence attitudes and bring about change.

WAW was founded in April 2001 to advocate for women then living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Since its inception, WAW has become the largest organization for Afghan women and girls globally, and the largest women’s organization in Afghanistan. To date, WAW has served over 30,000 clients and trained more than 330,000 individuals on women’s rights. WAW provides life-saving and life-changing services, education, and advocacy for women and children across Afghanistan and NY who have endured human rights violations. WAW’s capacity has grown from being volunteer-run when it was founded to now employing over 750 staff members, the vast majority of whom are Afghan and female.

