AMSO

Afghanistan Media Support Organisation

AMSO in 2025

Afghan Journalism under Repression and Resistance: Media Freedom, Exile, and Survival

Introduction

Four years after the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Afghan journalism faces a critical crossroads between suppression and survival. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, freedom of expression has been systematically eroded through censorship, violence, legal ambiguity, and ideological control. Independent media outlets within Afghanistan have been weakened or silenced, women journalists have been pushed out of public life, and journalists continue to face threats, arrests, and intimidation for performing their professional duties.

The Taliban have imposed strict content controls, banned images of living beings in many provinces, erased women's voices from broadcasting, and nullified the existing media law without replacing it (OHCHR, 2025). Journalism is no longer guided by clear legal protections but by arbitrary directives, surveillance, and fear. Meanwhile, hundreds of journalists have been forced into exile. Many now live in Pakistan, Iran, and other countries without legal status or proper protection, facing deportation, psychological trauma, unemployment, and prolonged uncertainty(RSF, 2025b).

In this environment of repression and displacement, the Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO) has continued to serve as a key advocate for Afghan journalism. In 2025, AMSO integrated advocacy, research, documentation, capacity building, emergency protection, and ethical leadership to support journalists inside Afghanistan and in exile.

This report combines two complementary perspectives: AMSO's 2025 activities report, which details the organization's strategic response to this crisis, and a thorough analysis of the conditions faced by journalists inside Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Together, they offer a comprehensive view of the extent of repression, the resilience of Afghan journalists, and the urgent need for ongoing international efforts to safeguard press freedom.

PART I: AMSO's activities in 2025

Since the regime change in August 2021, Afghanistan's media have faced a crisis. Freedom of speech is limited, independent outlets are weakened or silenced, and journalists, especially women, face violence, censorship, and exile. Inside the country, the Taliban controls content and uses state media for propaganda, while thousands in exile struggle with legal insecurity, deportation risks, and mental health challenges. In 2025, the Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO) continued to serve as a leading and trusted advocate for Afghan journalism. Through advocacy, international engagement, research, capacity building, ethical leadership, and emergency support, AMSO worked to ensure Afghan journalists were not left behind and that Afghan media remained active. This report

highlights AMSO's efforts in 2025, organized around key thematic pillars that address the needs of the Afghan media community and AMSO's strategic responses.

Global Advocacy and International Efforts to Promote Press Freedom: Raising Afghanistan's Media Crisis on the Global Stage

A central focus of AMSO's work in 2025 was ongoing international advocacy to keep Afghanistan's media crisis visible to global decision-makers. As worldwide attention to Afghanistan continues to wane, AMSO made concerted efforts to ensure that the voices of Afghan journalists and media, both inside and outside the country, are included in global discussions on human rights and press freedom.

The most prominent advocacy initiative was the Global Summit on Afghanistan Press Freedom, held in Berlin in November 2025. Organized by AMSO in collaboration with international partners, the summit brought together Afghan journalists from around the world, UN officials, diplomats, researchers, donors, and media development organizations. The event served as a rare space for collective reflection, testimony, and strategic dialogue on the future of Afghan journalism.

Speakers highlighted the systematic dismantling of free expression in Afghanistan, the rising risks faced by women journalists, and the increasing fragility of exile media. The summit emphasized that Afghan journalism remains active but highly endangered, and that international solidarity and ongoing support are crucial to prevent a total information blackout (AMSO, 2025b).

Beyond Berlin, AMSO representatives participated in numerous international conferences and forums throughout 2025. Through panels, workshops, and presentations, AMSO consistently briefed policymakers, donors, and media actors on the realities facing Afghan journalists and advocated for concrete actions, including protection mechanisms, funding, and ethical support for exile media.



Protection and Emergency Advocacy for Journalists in Exile: Responding to the Crisis in Pakistan and Iran

One of the most urgent issues addressed by AMSO in 2025 was the worsening situation of Afghan journalists living in Pakistan and Iran. Thousands of journalists who fled Afghanistan after 2021 remain stranded in these countries without legal status, valid visas, or access to protection. Many face arrest, harassment, extortion, detention, and forced deportation, often in violation of international refugee and human rights laws.

AMSO responded to this crisis through ongoing advocacy and emergency measures. In October 2025, the organization sent a second official letter, signed by hundreds of Afghan journalists, to the United Nations, UNHCR, OHCHR, and international press freedom groups. The letter outlined the increasing risks faced by journalists in Pakistan, including faster deportations and the life-threatening outcomes of forced returns to Afghanistan.



AjSO
Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization

OPEN LETTER FROM THE AFGHANISTAN JOURNALISTS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION (AJSO) TO THE UNITED NATIONS: ADVOCATING FOR AFGHAN JOURNALISTS STRANDED IN THIRD TRANSIT COUNTRIES

To: His Excellency Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017 USA

27.04.2025

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,
Afghan journalists, over the past two decades, have made significant efforts to act as representatives of civil society, playing an important role in shaping public opinion toward progress, prosperity, and civilization despite numerous challenges. One of the key achievements of this period has been the creation of a platform for public participation in social and political affairs. However, following the collapse of the republic (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – IRoA), journalists have been marginalized. They are deeply disappointed by the lack of attention from supporting institutions and the international community.

Journalists who have been forced to migrate due to security threats are now struggling with harsh and costly conditions in third countries, desperately searching for a glimmer of hope amid this crisis.

Challenges faced by Afghan journalists in third countries:

1. Prolonged processing of immigration cases
The immigration cases of journalists are facing long delays. Every day is crucial for them, so waiting years for a final decision has become unbearable. Journalists who cannot return to Afghanistan see expediting their case processing as their only hope for survival.
2. Lack of adequate attention from UNHCR
Afghan journalists whose cases are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) complain of excessive delays and discriminatory treatment. They demand immediate action regarding their situation.
3. Security threats in third countries
Many journalists face security threats even in third countries. In places like Pakistan, multiple cases of attacks and harassment against journalists have been reported.

Meanwhile, AMSO held a protest in Paris with Reporters Without Borders, the National Union of Journalists, and the International Federation of Journalists. The protest aimed to highlight urgent issues like stalled asylum cases, psychological distress, suicide attempts, and the deportation of journalists to Afghanistan. AMSO specifically urged French authorities to expedite humanitarian visa processing and establish safe routes for at-risk journalists.



Throughout the year, AMSO continued to engage embassies, UN agencies, and international partners, urging them to halt deportations, expedite visa processes, and provide emergency humanitarian and psychological support. This ongoing advocacy demonstrates AMSO's dedication to treating journalist safety as a fundamental human rights issue.

Defending Women Journalists and Promoting Gender Equality in Media: Advocacy, Visibility, and Resistance

Women journalists continue to be the most heavily impacted group within Afghanistan's media sector. In 2025, AMSO prioritized women journalists in its advocacy, programs, and research efforts. Through its Women Journalists Advocacy Committee, AMSO consistently emphasized gender-based repression, exclusion from media spaces, and the suppression of women's voices.

On the fourth anniversary of Afghanistan's fall, AMSO issued a significant public statement outlining the collapse of women's participation in media. The statement provided data showing that of more than 4,000 media workers, only 560 are women, and dozens of women journalists have been directly targeted by violence. Despite these challenges, AMSO emphasized that women journalists continue to resist, often risking their personal safety.



AMSO
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Four Years After the Fall, but Afghan Women Journalists Refuse to Be Silenced

14.08.2025

The Advocacy Committee for Women Journalists of Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO) marks the fourth dark anniversary of Afghanistan's fall

August 15 Stands as one of the darkest days in Afghanistan's recent history. On this day, the collapse of the IRoA not only upended the country's political and social fabric but also cast a long shadow over freedom of expression, silenced media diversity, and placed journalists' safety under constant threat, censorship, and intimidation.

According to available data, there are currently 297 active media outlets in the country, employing 4,160 media workers. Among them, only 560 are women serving in various media roles. Despite their contributions, violence against journalists persists. Over the past four years, 539 incidents of violence have been recorded, 52 of which targeted women journalists.

Yet, despite this harsh reality, Afghan journalists and media advocates have not given up. We remain steadfast, determined to keep the light of truth burning in even the darkest times. Afghanistan's media though wounded and tightly restricted, is still alive, and we believe it will endure. It is the courage of journalists, especially women, and the tireless commitment of those who defend free expression that keep the flow of information alive against all odds.

The Advocacy Committee for Women Journalists at AMSO, together with our colleagues in the media, reaffirms our strong commitment to protect freedom of expression, stand by journalists, and work toward the restoration of a truly free and independent media in Afghanistan. History will remember that we did not bow to repression, nor did we accept silence. We chose to resist!

With respect and sincerity,
The Advocacy Committee for Women Journalists
Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO)

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X: AFGHANISTANMSO FACEBOOK: AFGHANISTANMSO INSTAGRAM: AFGHANISTANMSO

AMSO also organized public discussions, special X (Twitter) Spaces, and advocacy campaigns focused on women journalists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. These initiatives amplified women's voices, connected them with international audiences, and challenged narratives that portray Afghan women as passive victims rather than active agents of resistance.

Capacity Building and Empowerment of Women Journalists: Building Skills, Safety, and Leadership under Repression

Capacity building was a key part of AMSO's efforts in 2025, especially for women journalists and human rights defenders. Recognizing that professional skills are vital to survival and resilience, AMSO conducted multiple training programs despite significant limitations.

The Safe Sisters Fellowship, a three-month program focused on digital safety, trained 15 women journalists through online sessions. Participants reported increased awareness of digital threats, improved security practices, and greater confidence in continuing their work safely.



In addition, AMSO implemented a four-month Leadership and Advocacy Training Program, graduating nearly 100 women journalists and human rights activists. The program equipped

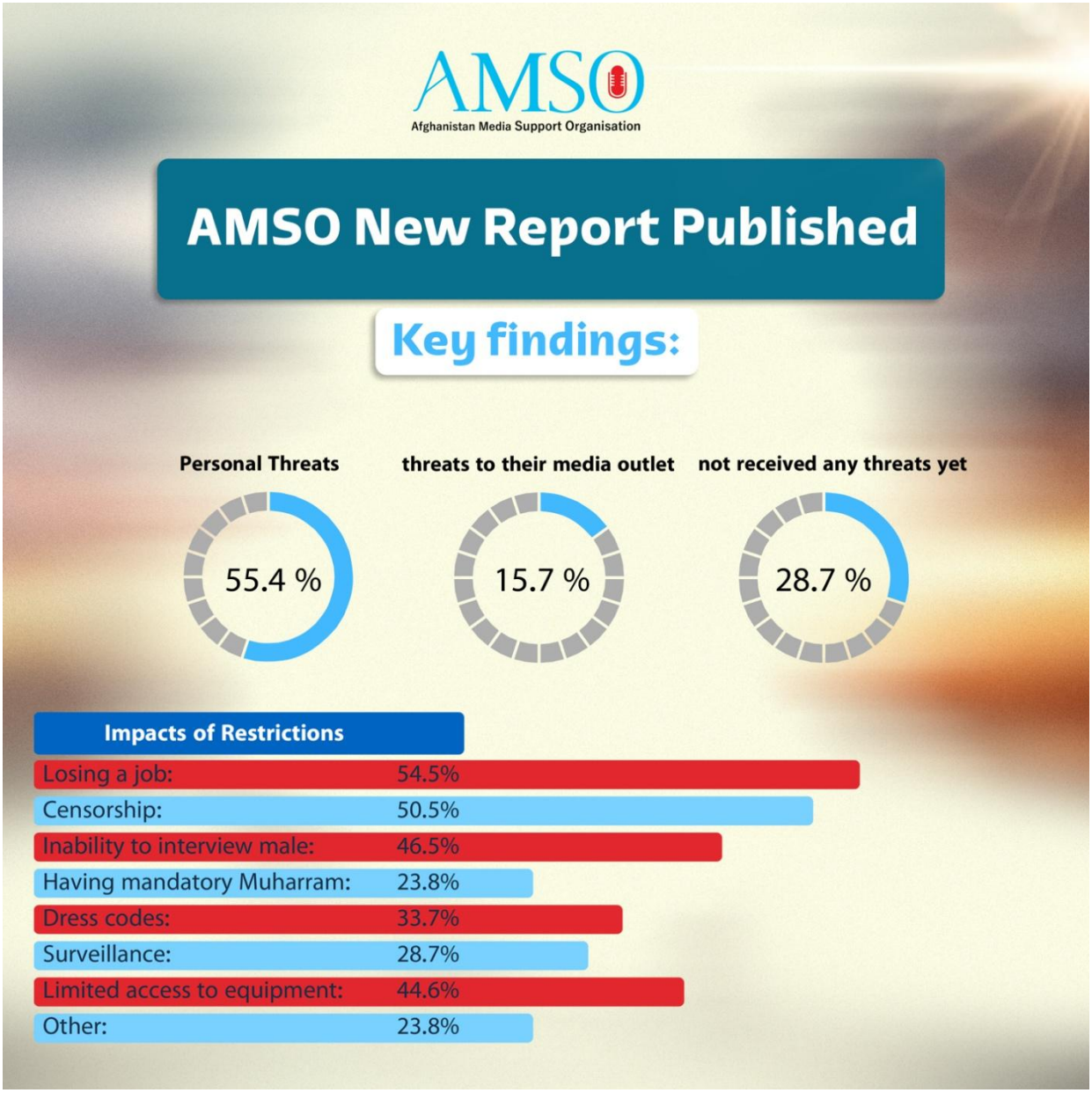


participants with skills in leadership, advocacy, ethics, and strategic communication, enabling them to continue engaging in media and human rights work despite restrictions. Additionally, AMSO also conducted in-person training sessions for women journalists and defenders, focusing on leadership, advocacy, and digital security.

Research, Documentation, and Knowledge Production: Evidence-Based Advocacy for Afghan Media

AMSO's advocacy in 2025 was based on ongoing research and data collection. The organization conducted several studies on the status of Afghan journalists, both inside the country and in exile, with a special emphasis on women.

The report "Resilience of Female Afghan Media Practitioners Post Regime Change" documented widespread censorship, lack of institutional support, forced content changes, and declining hope among women journalists. The findings showed that only a small percentage of women can work openly, while many operate in secrecy or have left the profession entirely (AMSO, 2025).



Another major study, "Invisible Labor: The Work of Afghan Female Journalists," highlighted how women continue journalism under pseudonyms, from home offices, and through encrypted platforms. The report describes this hidden work as both an act of resistance and a source of significant risk.

AMSO showcased the landscape of Afghan exile media and how Afghan journalists gather data at international research forums, including FOME 2025 in Bonn in December and the Symposium on Exile Journalism Research in Hamburg in May 2025. They contributed Afghan perspectives to global discussions on exile journalism, self-censorship, and mental health.



Ethical Leadership and Professional Standards in Exile Media: Developing a Code of Ethics in Exile

As Afghan media increasingly operate from exile, ethical challenges have become more complex. In response, AMSO led the development of a Code of Ethics in Exile for Afghan media. Based on recommendations from exile media owners and journalists in the 2024 symposium in Berlin, AMSO designated experts to draft ethical guidance applicable to journalism beyond national borders.

The draft was presented and discussed at the Berlin summit in November 2025, where journalists provided feedback and raised questions about professionalism, accountability, and credibility. The final version incorporated this feedback and reaffirmed that journalistic ethics must be upheld in exile, regardless of the geography or political pressure.

Coordination, Verification, and International Partnership: Strengthening Networks and Access to Support

In 2025, AMSO strengthened coordination with international partners through more than ten formal meetings with media assistance organizations, donors, and advocacy groups. These engagements focused on funding shortages, visa challenges of Afghan journalists, particularly in Pakistan, Iran, and neighboring countries, the sustainability of exile media, and the importance of including press freedom in diplomatic engagement with the Taliban.

AMSO also played a critical role in verifying Afghan journalists for international support programs and international media supporting organizations. Through established standards and trusted networks, the organization vetted more than 250 journalists, ensuring that assistance reached credible and vulnerable individuals.

PART II: Media and Journalism in Afghanistan under Taliban Rule: An Analysis of the Situation of Journalists Inside the Country

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghanistan's media and journalism sector has experienced one of the worst regressions of the 21st century. A media landscape that once included hundreds of outlets, investigative reports, and a growing number of women journalists has been systematically dismantled through censorship, intimidation, legal confusion, and direct violence. By the end of 2025, journalism in Afghanistan operates in an environment of fear, uncertainty, and enforced silence.

This report examines the current situation of journalists in Afghanistan based on documented observations and data collected by the Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO) and its partners. It highlights five interconnected areas: censorship and content restrictions, the lack of a legal framework, Taliban tactics for controlling public opinion, discriminatory and inconsistent treatment of journalists, and widespread violence against media workers. Special focus is given to the near elimination of women journalists from public media spaces.

The analysis shows that repression of journalism in Afghanistan is not just occasional or temporary but is systemic, deliberate, and changing over time. The Taliban's methods include ideological control, administrative pressure, and physical threats, creating a media environment that is neither free nor predictable and that deeply undermines the public's right to access information.

Expanding Censorship: The Ban on Live Images and Visual Journalism

One of the most visible and concerning developments in Afghanistan's media landscape is the ban on broadcasting live images of living beings on television in more than 20 provinces. This restriction, which has progressively expanded since its implementation, signifies a fundamental assault on visual journalism and modern broadcasting. Television journalism depends heavily on images to depict reality, record events, and hold those in power accountable. By banning images of living beings, the Taliban effectively removes television's most vital tool. News broadcasts are limited to static visuals, landscapes, or symbolic imagery, while reporters are prevented from showing protests, public gatherings, humanitarian conditions, or government actions. This significantly hampers journalists' ability to deliver accurate and compelling coverage of events on the ground.

The ban also has a disturbing psychological impact. Journalists working in provinces where the restriction is enforced must constantly self-censor to avoid punishment. Media outlets face uncertainty about whether similar bans will be imposed in other provinces, creating an atmosphere of instability and fear. The gradual expansion of the ban indicates an intentional strategy to normalize extreme censorship while avoiding immediate nationwide backlash. AMSO has publicly voiced concerns about this policy and issued press releases warning the international community. However, the continued and growing ban shows that, without intense international pressure, Taliban authorities feel confident to limit media freedoms further (RSF, 2025a).

Legal Vacuum: The Absence of a Media and Journalism Framework

A key feature of the current Afghan media scene is the lack of a functioning legal framework for journalism and media activities. After the regime change, the Taliban invalidated the previous media law without officially announcing its repeal or replacing it with a new one. As a result, journalists and media outlets operate in a legal gray area. There are no clear rules outlining what content is allowed, journalists' rights, protections, or due process. This uncertainty leaves media workers highly vulnerable, as they can be detained, summoned, or punished arbitrarily, with no reference to any specific law.

From an analytical perspective, this legal uncertainty benefits the Taliban. Without formal rules, authorities can selectively enforce unwritten norms, change policies without warning, and deny accountability. Journalists cannot challenge decisions legally, appeal arrests, or defend their work through official channels. The absence of laws turns journalism from a rights-based profession into an activity tolerated only at the discretion of local power holders. This legal void also weakens professional standards. Media outlets cannot depend on consistent regulations for licensing, employment, or content creation. Over time, this reduces institutional capacity and speeds up the decline of independent media, as organizations are unable to plan, invest, or operate sustainably.

Systematic Control of Public Opinion

Beyond overt censorship and legal ambiguity, the Taliban have developed systematic mechanisms to control public opinion and shape the media narrative. AMSO has documented several interlocking tactics that together constitute a coordinated strategy of information control. One such tactic is organizing regular meetings with journalists across all 34 provinces. While presented as coordination or guidance, these meetings function as mechanisms of pressure and surveillance. Journalists are instructed on acceptable narratives, warned against “un-Islamic” or “anti-national” content, and reminded of the consequences of disobedience. These meetings reinforce fear and ensure that journalists internalize Taliban red lines.

Another key mechanism is the promotion of Taliban narratives. Media outlets are encouraged or compelled to frame news in ways that legitimize Taliban governance, highlight stability, and downplay or ignore human rights abuses. Critical reporting is discouraged, while content that portrays the Taliban positively is rewarded with ongoing permission to operate. The regulation of media content via WhatsApp groups is a particularly insidious form of control. Journalists and editors are added to official messaging groups where daily instructions, bans, and content directives are issued. These groups enable authorities to monitor compliance in real time and send immediate warnings or threats. This informal system replaces formal regulation and further solidifies arbitrary enforcement. Additional tactics include whitewashing and image-polishing, where media are pressured to cover Taliban activities favorably, and monitoring of published content, both before and after dissemination. Together, these practices create an environment in which journalism becomes an extension of state messaging rather than an independent watchdog.

Discriminatory and Inconsistent Treatment across Provinces

The lack of a legal framework has led to very inconsistent and discriminatory treatment of journalists across Afghanistan's provinces. Media workers say that rules, restrictions, and punishments differ significantly from one province to another, depending on local Taliban commanders and officials. In some provinces, limited reporting might still be tolerated, while in others even minor deviations from official narratives lead to arrests or shutdowns. Journalists cannot predict how authorities will respond to their work, which increases self-censorship and discourages investigative reporting. This unpredictability is itself a form of repression.

This inconsistency also worsens inequality within the media industry. Journalists in more restrictive areas face higher risks and fewer opportunities, while those in relatively open regions still live under the constant threat of sudden policy shifts. The lack of consistency erodes any remaining sense of national media standards and fragments the already weakened media ecosystem. From an analytical perspective, this decentralized repression allows the Taliban to maintain plausible deniability at the national level while enforcing harsh measures locally. It also prevents journalists from organizing collectively, as conditions vary greatly and solidarity becomes harder.

Violence, Arrests, and Intimidation of Journalists

The most severe indicator of the media crisis in Afghanistan is the scale of violence and intimidation directed at journalists. Between August 2021 and December 2025, AMSO and its partners documented 566 cases of violence against journalists. These include killings, injuries, detentions, threats, beatings, kidnappings, surveillance, cyber harassment, and illegal behavior by authorities. Detention is by far the most common form of abuse, with 267 documented cases, followed by threats,

beatings, and misconduct. While killings are fewer in number, their impact is profound, reinforcing fear across the profession.

The data show that although many male journalists are victims, women journalists face unique and layered risks. Violence against women journalists often overlaps with gender-based discrimination, public shaming, and bans on participation, rather than just physical harm. These statistics reflect not isolated incidents, but a pattern of repression designed to intimidate journalists into silence. Arrests and detentions are often arbitrary, without charges or legal process, and frequently involve physical or psychological abuse. The cumulative effect is the normalization of fear as a part of working as a journalist (IFJ, 2025).

The Near-Erasure of Women Journalists

Perhaps the most devastating development in Afghanistan's media landscape is the absence of women journalists in 21 of the country's 34 provinces. In many areas, women are not only barred from working in the media but are also prohibited from having their voices broadcast. This effectively removes women from public discourse.

The consequences extend beyond the profession itself. When women journalists are silenced, issues affecting women, such as education bans, healthcare access, forced marriages, and economic exclusion, go largely unreported. This creates a distorted public narrative in which women's experiences are invisible. Even in provinces where women journalists are nominally present, their work is heavily restricted. Many are confined to non-public roles, operate under pseudonyms, or are excluded from field reporting. The ban on broadcasting female voices further entrenches gender apartheid in media representation.

Analytically, the exclusion of women journalists serves both ideological and political purposes for the Taliban. It reinforces their vision of gender segregation while eliminating one of the most critical sources of independent reporting on women's rights abuses.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report underscore a stark and undeniable reality: Afghanistan is experiencing one of the most severe media repression crises in the world today. Through censorship, legal uncertainty, narrative control, inconsistent enforcement, and widespread violence, the Taliban have transformed journalism inside the country into a hazardous and constrained activity. The near erasure of women journalists and the silencing of women's voices have further deepened this crisis, depriving Afghan society of essential perspectives and accountability.

At the same time, the situation of journalists in exile reveals a parallel emergency. Forced displacement, legal precarity, stalled asylum processes, and psychological trauma threaten not only individual journalists but the future of Afghan media. Without protection and support, exile journalism risks collapse, further narrowing the space for independent Afghan voices. Despite these challenges, Afghan journalism has not disappeared. Journalists continue to report, document, and resist silence, often invisibly, under extreme pressure, and at significant personal risk. AMSO's work in 2025 demonstrates that sustained advocacy, research, capacity building, and ethical leadership can help preserve this resilience and prevent total information darkness.

Defending press freedom in Afghanistan is not only about journalism; it is about human dignity, access to truth, and society's right to know. As international attention continues to wane, the responsibility of global actors to support Afghan journalists becomes even more urgent. AMSO remains committed to standing with Afghan journalists, inside the country and in exile, until freedom of expression is restored and independent media can once again operate without fear.



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