



Zan Times  
Photo: Mahsa Elham

Loreen Arbus Accessibility is Fundamental Program

## For Women and Girls with Disabilities in Afghanistan: Their Plight Increases

“Gender prejudice should not be tolerated!”

 Dawn Grabowski  
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A 2020 [report](#) by Human Rights Watch has revealed how four decades of war have left Afghanistan with one of the world’s largest populations per capita for people with disabilities, including many with amputations, vision or hearing problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder. But the true size and circumstances of Afghanistan’s

Since women and girls with disabilities have become even more vulnerable since the Taliban's rule, it is becoming increasingly difficult for those with disabilities to live a productive life. In addition to structural and architectural barriers, women are no longer allowed to work or school. In contrast, prior to the Taliban rule, women were able to work in health care, teaching, and in the public sector as aid workers with NGOs.

Even before the Taliban's return to power, almost 80 percent of adults had some form of "physical, functional, sensory or other impairment," including nearly 14 percent who were disabled, according [to a survey](#) by the Asia Foundation and [analysis](#) by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. Of the 4.5 million people who are disabled, war and roadside mines resulted in nearly 42 percent of their disabilities. They live in dire situations, usually with little access to education, work, or healthcare. Often, they are dependent on their families for survival. Now, with many families struggling for food and many NGOs shuttered after the Taliban takeover, the plight of this already vulnerable population has become even more precarious, since they are often left to fend for themselves. And it's women and girls who are at most risk since the Taliban has [restricted their rights](#) to both work and education.

Further restrictions include the inability to appear in public without a head covering (hijab, cadar, burqa, abaya, tunbaan) or male escort. Zahra Nader, Editor-in-Chief of Zan Times and a Human Rights Advocate, told Women's eNews that gender prejudice (basic human rights denied due to being born female) should not be tolerated. "This affects 20 million people and is truly a crisis that should be addressed by all world leaders, and all humanity. It should not be tolerated by anyone," Nader asserts.

percent of adults having severe disabilities (up from 2.7 percent in 2005). This [increase](#) is largely due to more than four decades of war, which have resulted in at least one million Afghans losing either a limb, vision or hearing.

For example, Zahra\* was a disabled woman living in Afghanistan in 2023. When she was four years old, doctors visited her village to administer polio and tetanus vaccines. After having a bad reaction to the vaccines her foot turned black. “The doctors explained that a faulty vaccine injection was the cause of the blackness in my foot,” she recalls. “They said the damage was permanent and my leg needed to be amputated at the knee.” This is where Zahra’s challenges began. Zahra’s father died when she was only thirteen, and then when she was only 15 (below the age of legal marriage), she was [forced to marry](#) a man thirty years her senior, since her marriage provided her family with a dowry of approximately seven thousand dollars. Others in her community told her that no one except an old man would marry her because she is disabled, while still others said that since Zahra cannot do anything, she is a burden to her family and to the old man who married her.

Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, and adopted the Law on Rights and Privileges of Persons with Disabilities the following year, but to date there have been few concrete steps to provide services to individuals living with disabilities. Assistance for Afghans with disabilities has [never been a high priority](#) for the government or the donor community, and political instability, insecurity, poor economic conditions, and weak governance have [undermined efforts](#) by the government to address their needs. .

An official of the Association for the Physically Disabled in Ghor has also criticized the Taliban’s decision to [halt disability payments](#) since September of 2022. “More budget should be designated for the people with disabilities, because disabled people can’t do anything. They should be helped by the government and non-governmental institutions,” he says. “That’s why we protested so that our demands

essential to their survival and that of their families, especially as winter approaches.

Unfortunately, the situation has not yet improved. “To get my disabled person’s allowance, I have gone to the Martyrs and Disabled Affairs Office four times,” Zahra says. “For the first three times, the Taliban would say that their chief wasn’t available. I wouldn’t go away, but instead, stood there for two to three hours, requesting to see the chief. Once, an annoyed Taliban soldier said, ‘We told you he’s not here. Go and leave us alone, or we’ll beat you up and throw you out.’ She then decided to arrive early at the ministry’s gate.” I asked a disabled man waiting nearby to tell me when he saw the Taliban leader arrive,” Zahra continues. “At around 10 a.m., the stranger pointed to a Ranger pick-up truck. I ran forward to the vehicle, my cane falling from my hand, screaming “It’s evident that I am poor and destitute. I beg you in the name of God to help us and provide us with the disabled person’s allowance,” He lowered his window to reply, “The centre [capital] has stopped the disabled person’s allowance. Whenever they send us, we will inform you.” As she pleaded for help, he drove away, only to be left to tell the guard at the gate that she wanted to see the chief, since she had just seen him arrive. The guard replied, “You have mistaken someone else with him; he hasn’t come yet. Go away and don’t bother us, you cripple.” Zahra said that he then pushed her with his gun, causing her to fall to the ground. “In despair, I headed towards home, crying and pleading for God to come to our aid,” she adds.

*\*Several of the names were changed to protect their identities.*

**About the Author:** Dawn Grabowski is a fellow with [The Loreen Arbus Accessibility is Fundamental Program](#), a fellowship created with Women’s eNews to train women with disabilities as professional journalists so that they may write, research and report on the most crucial issues impacting the disabilities community. Dawn is also an Actress, Filmmaker, Content Creator, Speaker, Voiceover Artist, Producer, & Sit-Down Comic because she’s not qualified to stand. Born with Central – Nervous

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