



Afghans
For Progressive
Thinking (APT)

YOUTH-LED POLICY STRATEGY

Youth Inclusion Strategy

2026 - 2029

Prepared by Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT),
with support from the Youth Democracy Network (YDN)

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Acknowledgments:

The Youth Inclusion Strategy was developed drawing on survey data, interviews, and consultations conducted with Afghan youth. While the drafting was led by Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), with support from the Youth Democracy Network (YDN) Mini Grants Program (implemented by the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies), the insights and recommendations reflect the collective voices and contributions of Afghan youth inside Afghanistan and across the diaspora.

Introduction

Afghanistan today stands at a crossroads where the voices of its youth are silenced yet their demands are louder than ever. At Afghans for Progressive Thinking, we have developed the Youth Inclusion Strategy 2026–2029 from the lived experiences of Afghan youth, their urgent priorities, and their recommendations gathered through surveys, interviews, policy briefs, and consultations. This strategy is youth-led, shaped by young women and men inside Afghanistan and across the diaspora and it is designed to guide future policy engagement on women's rights, education, employment, and participation.

The survey data, reinforced by interviews with Afghan youth leaders, and consultations, show urgent demand from young men and women in Afghanistan: education, jobs, rights, and dignity must be restored, and youth must be included in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

The demands in this strategy are clear, youth wants reopening of schools, creating jobs, protecting rights, and providing mental health support. Most importantly, it is actionable as it provides recommendations for governments, the United Nations, donors, civil society, and youth organizations themselves.

Purpose of the Strategy

- To outline advocacy pathways for Afghan youth, especially on women's rights.
- To guide future policy engagement by governments, UN agencies, and civil society.
- To ensure youth-led organizations remain at the center of institutional partnerships.
- To provide a roadmap for urgent international action that responds directly to youth priorities.

WHY THIS STRATEGY MATTERS

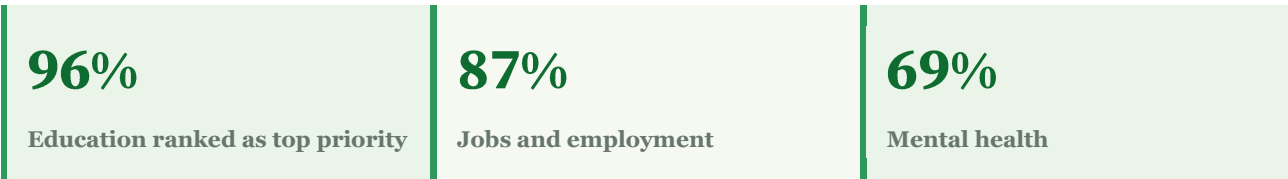
This is not just a crisis of opportunity, it is a crisis of trust, thus, this Youth Inclusion Strategy is designed to rebuild that trust by placing Afghan youth at the center of advocacy, policy, and action.

Data Analysis - surveys, interviews, and consultations

During the months of June and July 2026, APT conducted surveys, interviews, and consultations with young men and women from different provinces in Afghanistan. The data we gathered shows one strong message: Afghan youth want education above everything else. This is not scattered answer, they are repeated demands across different questions and formats.

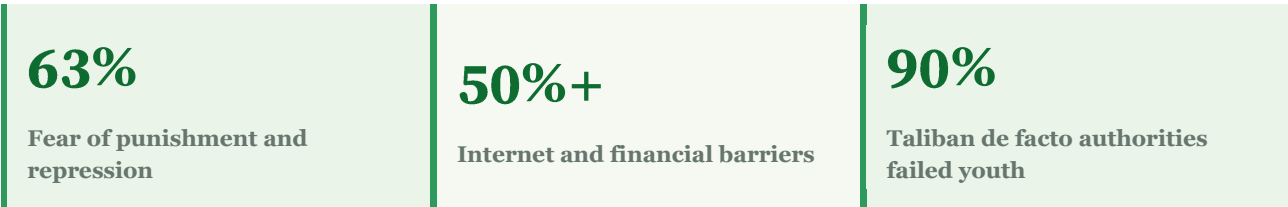
It is important to note that Afghan youth were not asked to choose only one priority in the surveys and interviews. Each respondent could select several issues they considered most

urgent and rank them within their top five. We provide them this chance because they might have chosen both education and jobs, or education and mental health, depending on their lived reality. That is why we see high percentages across multiple categories.



Our findings show that 96% ranked education as their top priority, highlighting how the ban on girls’ universities and schools have become the most urgent threat to their future. At the same time, from all the respondents, around 87% identified jobs and employment as their second priority as they linked survival and dignity directly to economic opportunity. These priorities are not isolated as they reflect a generation that sees learning, work, and freedom as inseparable, believing that reopening schools and creating pathways to work are the foundation for rebuilding the country.

Beyond education and jobs, youth voices highlight the another urgent struggle that often go unheard in Afghanistan today. 69% of youth participants mentioned about mental health describing trauma, stress, and depression as something they struggle with daily after five years of right violating restrictions. More than half also raised climate change and digital rights connecting environmental damage to food insecurity and migration and internet restrictions to silencing of their voices. These findings show that Afghan youth want the world to act now, not symbolically, and to recognize that their priorities are connected struggles shaping the future of Afghanistan.



We asked them to describe the barriers that make their goals harder than it already is to reach. Around 63% of respondents said that fear of the Taliban’s punishment, detainment, and repression. Over 50% of respondents pointed to internet restrictions and financial barriers as poor connectivity, censorship, and poverty made it hard for them to learn, advocate, and participate. When asked which entities or institutional failure compounds these barriers, around 90% of our respondents said the de facto authorities had failed them, citing bans on education and repression as the biggest betrayal. Also, more than half pointed out disappointment with the UN while large groups criticized donor governments, NGOs, and even universities. These responses highlight a deep loss of trust as young people feel abandoned by both national and international institutions. The fact that respondents could select multiple institutions explains why the percentages are high across several categories, youth believe failure is widespread not isolated.

Strategic Pathways for Action

To make this strategy actionable, based on the evidence highlighted, the interviews with youth who have been experiencing these challenges, and our consultations with girls and boys from different provinces of Afghanistan, we propose a clear pathway that involves relevant actors like advocates, schools, universities, institutions, governments, the United Nations, donors, and civil society. The following framework is designed as a step-by-step guideline that can be followed and monitored.

To Youth Advocates and Organizations

- Establish a permanent Youth Data Observatory run by Afghan youth, inside and in diaspora, that continuously collects, verifies, and publishes real-time data on education access, employment, and rights violations. This will move the advocacy efforts from annual or quarter reports to a living evidence and experiences of Afghan youth that could be more helpful for policymakers.
- Build a secure, encrypted digital platform where Afghan youth can anonymously share testimonies, track restrictions, and coordinate campaigns. This platform would act as both a protection mechanism and a global amplifier, bypassing censorship and ensuring youth voices reach international audiences instantly.
- Develop annual “Youth Accountability Scorecards” rating governments, UN agencies, and donors on their actual delivery for Afghan youth. Publish these ratings publicly to pressure institutions into measurable action, not symbolic statements.
- Instead of just forums, create joint taskforces pairing diaspora youth with local Afghan youth to co-design advocacy briefs. This ensures lived realities inside Afghanistan are matched with international lobbying power, creating a two-tier advocacy engine.
- Transform the committee into a rotating leadership council where different provinces and diaspora groups take turns leading campaigns every quarter. This prevents centralization, keeps momentum fresh, and ensures diverse representation.

To Schools and Universities

- Instead of large, complex programs, set up small, rapid-response scholarship pools that can be awarded within weeks. These can cover essentials like exam fees, internet access, or short courses, immediate, life-changing support without bureaucracy.
- Create safe virtual study circles by partnering with CSOs and NGOs in Afghanistan. These learning circles can be led by teachers who lost their jobs in Afghanistan after return of the Taliban. Universities and Schools can provide reading materials, recorded lectures, and also mentorship by alumni network to make education accessible even when formal schools are closed.

- Make the admission process flexible for Afghan girls banned from education to enable them to apply with partial transcripts or informal learning records. Universities and colleges can then provide catch-up modules to fill gaps and making sure no one is excluded because of interrupted schooling.
- Build mentorship chains where each Afghan student who receives support commits to mentoring two more students. This multiplies impact organically and keeps the support network growing without heavy resources.
- Instead of lengthy reports, collect short, visual “snapshots”, one-page profiles or short videos of Afghan students overcoming barriers. These can be shared quickly on social media and in advocacy campaigns, making stories powerful and easy to spread.

To Institutions and Governments

- We currently have advisory councils but setting up small fast response desks inside ministries where youth representatives can submit urgent issues (education bans, job barriers, harassment cases) and receive a formal reply within 30 days will create more accountability and quick responses with deadlines.
- Launch programs that provide micro-grants or small amounts of funding for youth-led projects in local communities like from tailoring workshops to digital freelancing hubs which are low-cost, quick to set up, and directly create employment opportunities.
- Policy documents or message collection from heart of communities would be helpful to be published by governments under reports like “Youth Trust Report” every year. This could be co-signed by youth representatives, showing progress on education, jobs, and rights. This can create accountability along with measurable and visible outcomes.
- Having rotating youth delegates who join ministry meetings for three-month terms will make sure fresh perspectives and prevents tokenism while giving more young people real exposure to policymaking.

To the United Nations

- Governments should not just endorse youth strategies in statements, they should visibly integrate youth recommendations into national plans, with a clear “youth section” in every policy document. This makes youth priorities impossible to ignore.
- Establish a simple, secure hotline or encrypted reporting channel managed jointly with Afghan youth groups. This allows activists and students to report harassment or detention in real time, triggering immediate UN follow-up instead of waiting for long reports.
- Create a public tracker showing how Afghan youth recommendations are reflected in UN resolutions and declarations. This makes inclusion visible and prevents youth voices from being lost in vague language.

- Instead of only UN-run monitoring, support community monitoring circles led by Afghan youth inside Afghanistan and diaspora. These circles feed verified data to the UN, making protection mechanisms grounded in lived realities.

To Donor Governments & Civil Society NGOs

- Require every UN program in Afghanistan to have a youth co-design component, meaning Afghan youth representatives help shape the program before it launches.
- Support diaspora youth networks by funding small online spaces where Afghan youth abroad can coordinate campaigns, translate reports, and connect directly with policymakers. This makes global advocacy structured and consistent.
- Partner with local NGOs to create small, mobile training groups that rotate between communities teaching practical skills (digital freelancing, tailoring, agriculture). These pods are low-cost and directly tied to employment.
- Provide Afghan youth with “starter kits” for remote work, laptops, internet vouchers, and short training modules. This is practical, immediately usable, and connects youth to global job markets.
- Form co-advocacy teams where youth organizations and NGOs jointly draft reports and present findings to donors. This ensures youth voices are not just “consulted” but actively shape messaging.
- Fund peer-to-peer mental health support chains where trained youth mentors provide psychosocial support to others in their community. This multiplies reach without requiring large infrastructure.

To Policy Makers and International Partners

- Require every international agreement or policy framework on Afghanistan to include a youth priority clause where a short section outline how Afghan youth concerns (education, jobs, rights) are addressed. This makes youth inclusion non-negotiable.
- Before every international conference, circulate brief summaries from Afghan youth surveys and consultations. Policymakers receive these briefs as mandatory reading, making sure decisions are based in youth realities.
- Instead of inviting the same few representatives, establish rotating youth delegations where different Afghan youth groups take turns attending international negotiations. This prevents tokenism and ensures diverse voices are consistently heard.
- Hold annual hearings where Afghan youth present progress reports directly to policymakers and international partners. These hearings act as accountability checkpoints, ensuring promises translate into measurable outcomes.
- International partners should visibly endorse the Youth Inclusion Strategy by adopting a badge system — marking policies, programs, or funding streams as “aligned with Afghan Youth Strategy 2026–2029.” This creates public recognition and pressure for alignment.

- Form joint monitoring panels where Afghan youth representatives sit alongside policymakers to review progress annually. This ensures monitoring is not just external but co-owned by youth themselves.

FROM RECOMMENDATION TO DELIVERY

By following this pathway, institutions can rebuild trust, governments can restore dignity, and the international community can prove its commitment to Afghan youth. For this strategy to succeed, it must move beyond recommendations into practical implementation. Afghan youth cannot afford another cycle of promises without delivery. The recommendations outlined above shows how different actors—youth organizations, schools, universities, governments, the UN, donors, and civil society—must coordinate step by step to ensure that the demands of Afghan youth are transformed into real outcomes.

THREE-YEAR OPERATIONAL ROADMAP (2026–2029)

Timeline	Foundations
Q3-Q4 2026	Youth groups: Launch Data Observatory & secure testimony platform.
	Schools: Provide rapid scholarships & set up virtual study circles.
	Governments: Open fast response desks for urgent youth issues.
	UN: Start encrypted hotline for harassment reports.
	Donors/NGOs: Distribute starter kits (laptops, vouchers) & train peer mentors.
Timeline	Building Accountability & Access
Q1-Q2 2027	Youth groups: Publish Accountability Scorecards.
	Schools: Begin flexible admissions for Afghan girls; embed mentorship chains.
	Governments: Launch micro-grant programs.
	UN: Create public tracker of youth recommendations.
	Donors/NGOs: Fund diaspora networks; deploy mobile training pods.
Timeline	Joint Advocacy & Accountability
Q3-Q4 2027	Youth groups: Form joint taskforces with diaspora; run visual campaigns.
	Schools: Formalize alumni mentoring.
	Governments: Publish annual Youth Trust Report.
	UN: Support community monitoring circles.
	Donors/NGOs: Build co-advocacy teams.
	Policymakers: Rotate youth delegations in negotiations.
Timeline	Institutional Access & Evidence
Q1-Q2 2028	Youth groups: Release annual evidence report.
	Governments: Rotate youth delegates in ministries.
	UN: Add youth sections in national plans.
	Donors/NGOs: Scale starter kits & expand peer mental health chains.
	Policymakers: Hold annual hearings with youth.
	Youth groups: Release annual evidence report.

Timeline	Integration & Long-Term Structures
Q3–Q4 2028	Youth groups: Expand rotating leadership council.
	Schools: Provide catch-up modules for interrupted schooling.
	Governments: Embed Youth Trust Report in accountability frameworks.
	UN: Publish annual inclusion tracker.
	Donors/NGOs: Fund diaspora advocacy hubs.
	Policymakers: Adopt badge system & set up joint monitoring panels.
Timeline	Permanent Structures & Sustainability
Q1–Q2 2029	Youth groups: Make Data Observatory permanent.
	Schools: Institutionalize flexible admissions.
	Governments: Institutionalize micro-grant programs.
	UN: Formalize community monitoring circles.
	Donors/NGOs: Sustain mobile training pods.
	Policymakers: Require youth clauses in all agreements; conduct annual joint reviews.

MEL Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) & Target Metrics

Pillar Metric	Specific Key Indicator	Verification Source / Tool	3-Year Target (2028)
Education Access	Afghan girls enrolled via flexible admissions & catch-up modules	University admission records, scholarship disbursement logs	2,000+ girls admitted
Digital Learning	Active learners in study circles & online platforms	LMS logins, virtual classroom attendance reports	5,000+ active learners
Employment & Livelihoods	Youth earning income through micro-grants, freelancing, or training pods	Grant reports, secure payment receipts, training completion certificates	1,000+ youth livelihoods created
Mental Health Support	Youth receiving peer-to-peer counseling	Mentor activity logs, anonymized support session records	2,000+ youth supported
Advocacy & Policy Influence	Youth recommendations adopted in government/UN reports	Official transcripts, policy documents, UN resolutions	10+ policy adaptations
Trust & Accountability	Annual Youth Trust Reports published & referenced	Government reports co-signed by youth reps	3 reports published
Global Reach	Youth campaigns & diaspora advocacy hubs engagement	Social media analytics, campaign dashboards	5,000,000+ views/engagements
Institutionalization	Permanent structures established (Data Observatory, micro-grant programs, monitoring circles)	Institutional charters, government decrees, UN documentation	All core mechanisms permanent by 2029

Final Note on Implementation

This framework provides a defined role and clear responsibilities that could transform youth demands into a roadmap for action, where education, jobs, rights, and mental health are not just discussed but delivered. The credibility of governments, the UN, and donors depends on whether they act on these steps. For Afghan youth, implementation is not optional, it is survival.