



REPORT

THE 2ND AFGHAN WOMEN'S GLOBAL BUSINESS FORUM



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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Context and Paths Forward	4
Afghan Women Leading in Business from Afghanistan to the World	5
Support Systems in Action – Associations and Organizations Driving Growth	6
Male Allies Supporting Women in Business	7
Messages of Hope and Continuity	8
Key Outcomes and Recommendations	9
Conclusion	10

Introduction

The Global Women's Trade Caravan, in partnership with the Afghanistan International Business Council (AIBC), hosted the 2nd Afghan Women's Global Business Forum on August 12, 2025, at Counterpart International's office in Washington, D.C. The event brought together Afghan women entrepreneurs, diaspora leaders, civil society representatives, and international supporters of Afghan women's entrepreneurship to explore opportunities, discuss challenges, and develop collaborative strategies for enhancing the economic participation of Afghan women.

More than 40 participants attended in person, and over 80 joined virtually, with attendees coming from Afghanistan and around the world. Supporting partners included the Afghan Women Leaders Forum (AWLF), the Afghan American Women Association (AAWA), and the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS program of the Enterprising Women Foundation.

The forum aimed to:

- Deepen understanding of Afghan businesswomen's challenges and identify a scalable solution.
- Mobilize the diaspora to support women-led businesses inside Afghanistan.
- Establish a sustainable cross-border support network for Afghan business owners.
- Facilitate networking through mentorship, market access, and partnerships.

The forum consisted of three panel discussions featuring expert and field-experienced speakers, two working groups (one from inside the country and one in the diaspora), and three breakout sessions where participants engaged in a discussion on challenges, strategies, and business support organizations inside Afghanistan and in the diaspora.

In accordance with our forum's objectives to establish sustainable and cross-border support, and considering the initial forum's recommendation for a more robust mechanism to connect Afghan women globally, the GWTC has achieved a significant milestone through the inauguration of the Afghan Women's Global Business Hub. This digital platform facilitates connections among Afghan women entrepreneurs worldwide, providing training, mentorship, market opportunities, and financial literacy resources tailored for Afghan women. The digital business Hub aims to empower women to establish and engage in business-to-business activities. This portal will serve as a unified platform for Afghan women business owners, both within and outside the country, to help them convene more easily. The Hub features discussion forums, enabling Afghan women to communicate, develop advocacy messaging, and exchange resources through the resource center, thereby fostering mutual success.

Context and Paths Forward

The forum opened with a recognition of Afghan women as economic actors not only in Afghanistan but also in diaspora, such as the United States (US), Canada, Europe, and worldwide. The panelists highlighted the tenacity and determination of women in rebuilding their lives and enterprises despite unprecedented restrictions. The opening remarks emphasized the importance of coordinated global partnerships to amplify Afghan women's businesses and strengthen their leadership roles. Speakers pointed to the value of cross-organizational collaboration, especially at a time when resources are limited, and underscored the urgency of sustaining momentum through collective responsibility. Together, these reflections set the tone for the forum as both a celebration of Afghan women's courage and a call to action for unified efforts in advancing women's economic empowerment. As thousands of Afghan women run businesses in Afghanistan and various countries, there is a need for proper research to identify them and highlight their financial contributions, so they are recognized as partners, not beneficiaries, wherever they are.

Moving forward, from October 2025 onward, Afghan women entrepreneurs, both within Afghanistan and in the diaspora, will be invited to join the digital portal of the Afghan Women's Global Business Hub. The Hub will be a safe place where individuals can interact, conduct business, network, and discuss advocacy initiatives.



Afghan Women Leading in Business from Afghanistan to the World



Participants of this panel highlighted the resilience of Afghan women, who continue to run diverse traditional businesses despite restricted mobility, the collapse of institutional support, and scarce financial resources. Digital trade platforms, such as madebyafghanwomen.com, connecting Afghan women to global buyers, have emerged as vital lifelines, helping women sustain economic activity under these challenging conditions.

Participants of the panel highlighted the Afghan diaspora as both a driver of trade and a powerful voice for advocacy. However, challenges such as displacement, resettlement, high shipping costs, limited storage, and weak mentorship networks persist. Virtual speakers from Afghanistan emphasized the importance of cross-border networks in sustaining women-owned businesses.

Entrepreneurs also emphasized strategies to professionalize Afghan women's enterprises in Afghanistan, the US, and elsewhere, including sound branding, better customer service, creative packaging, and expanding into markets beyond the diaspora. They identified standardization, service training, and packaging expertise as crucial enablers of success for Afghan businesses.

The session concluded with a strong message: through mentorship, collaboration, and global outreach, Afghan women entrepreneurs can turn barriers into opportunities and position their businesses to thrive in international markets.

Thanks to the moderator
Joy Kolin, Founder and
Executive Director of Giving

Joy and speakers:

- Behnaz Saljoqi, Chair of
AWCCI, West Zone
- Tammam Yahia, UNDP's
Portfolio Manager for
Sustainable Livelihood and
Resilience
- Wananga Honari,
representing the Afghan
Women Leaders Forum
- Negina Yari, Executive
Director of Window for Hope
Organization

Support Systems in Action – Associations and Organizations Driving Growth



Speakers on this panel emphasized that Afghan women entrepreneurs and their support organizations continue to advocate for women's economic rights, despite the severe restrictions in Afghanistan. Some of the collective recommendations from this panel included strengthening global advocacy campaigns, incorporating Afghan women's voices into international policy debates, and directing donor and international community support toward business associations and women's organizations. These entities can play a crucial role in connecting women entrepreneurs both inside and outside Afghanistan.

The discussion further underlined the importance of global solidarity and institutionalized support mechanisms to help Afghan women navigate the dual challenges of displacement and entrepreneurship. Participants highlighted how diaspora-led creative enterprises can expand Afghan women's global visibility, provide mentorship and technical training, and sustain advocacy for women's rights under restrictive regimes. Also, they recognized grassroots as vital lifelines for Afghan women business owners. A continued effort can be to respond to these practical recommendations can be supported by the hub we have launched.

Key organizations identified as central to strengthening Afghan women's business ecosystems at the panel included the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), the Afghan Women's Leadership Foundation (AWLF), diaspora business councils, and policy-oriented think tanks.

Concrete actions proposed were:

- Leveraging diaspora organizations for mentorship and digital training.
- Developing referral databases, toolkits, and opportunity newsletters.
- Exploring virtual platforms to sustain engagement between Afghan women inside and outside the country.

Thanks to our moderator Hadeia Amiry, Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and speakers:

- Barbara Langley, Director of CIPE's Center for Women's Economic Empowerment.
- Afsana Rahimi, Chair of AWCCI and CEO of AIBC.
- Nillab Pazhwak, Executive Director of Afghan American Women Association
- Rabia Zargarpur, founder of RABIA Z. Fashion in Dubai.

Male Allies Supporting Women in Business



The panel outlined actionable strategies for engaging men as allies in advancing women's entrepreneurship. Speakers of the panel emphasized that women must be provided with learning opportunities alongside their male peers to improve the quality of their products and services, enabling them to compete effectively in today's dynamic market.

Male allies play a crucial role by providing market exposure, facilitating access to finance, and connecting their networks to support women-led businesses. Virtual participants underscored the importance of mobilizing resources for women-led initiatives, sharing examples of mentorship and community-based support mechanisms.

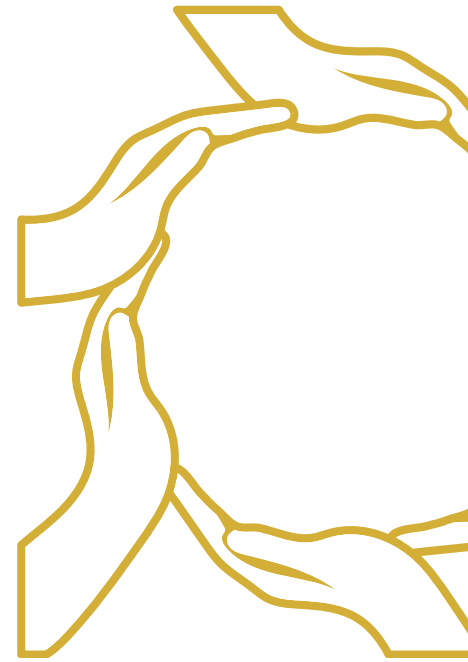
The discussion also highlighted the need to establish formal structures that connect diaspora resources, particularly legal and business expertise, with Afghan women entrepreneurs. These connections can significantly expand opportunities for women in exile, fostering sustainable growth and resilience.

The panelists also stressed the importance of partnerships for inclusive and sustainable business growth. The panel participants recommended increasing collaborative efforts between women-led and male-led companies, as this can unlock new opportunities, foster innovation, and boost market competitiveness. By working together, businesses can tap into diverse perspectives, share resources, and build resilient ecosystems that support mutual success. These collaborations not only improve operational capacity but also promote gender equity in economic development, creating a more balanced and thriving entrepreneurial environment.

Thanks to our moderator
Lida Nadery Hedayat,
Director of Women's
Leadership, Counterpart
International, and our
speakers:

- Masood Karokhail, CEO of
The Liaison Office (TLO)
- Asad Zamir, CEO of Zamir
Foundation
- Arash Sahebe, CEO of
Sahebe Financial Services
- Mariam Atash, an
international attorney and
business owner

Messages of Hope and Continuity



During the forum, two successful Afghan diaspora women, Mariam Mustafa, Co-owner and Chief Operating Officer of Bamyān Restaurant, and Sharifa Abassi, an immigrant lawyer and proprietor of Abassi Law Firm, discussed their achievements.

At the fireside chat titled “Success with Purpose: Business and Community Impact,” they presented their diaspora life and business journey and emphasized that Afghan women are not passive victims of crisis but relatively active contributors to community reconstruction. The message they sent was the need for continuous connections, enhanced advocacy, and increased utilization of diaspora influence to empower women-led enterprises.

Key Recommendations of the Forum

Access to Information

Provide information about opportunities, business expos, business grants, and business support resources to Afghan women inside and outside the country.

Access to Finance

Provide long-term loans and grants to enable businesses to grow and create a sound financial foundation to the companies.

Capacity Building

Training in business operations, customer service, financial management, digital marketing, digital sales, and scaling strategies.

Networking & Mentorship

Establish networks of Afghan women entrepreneurs and mentorship programs to connect skills, share knowledge, and provide guidance.

Professionalization

Support and guide women in establishing a foundation for credibility and growth through legal registration, branding, websites, packaging, and customer service.

Market Access

Move beyond Afghan diaspora markets to reach international audiences with standardized, high-quality, and diversely designed products.

Product Strategy

Provide insights to Afghan women inside the country on products that best sell in the US, Canada, and European markets, focusing on affordable, simple products while maintaining quality and innovation.

Infrastructure

Address shipping costs, lack of storage, and small-scale production, as these are key barriers. Support women within the country in installing solar power panels and provide them access to the internet.

Sustainability

Incorporate customer feedback, standardization, and long-term services from business support organizations to sustain business growth.

CONCLUSION

The Global Afghan Women's Business Forum reaffirmed the determination, creativity, and resilience of Afghan women. Despite the restrictive environments within the country, they remain vital contributors to economic and social progress. Despite their struggles with immigration and resettlement in new economies, they remain committed to achieving financial independence and helping other Afghans gain employment and dignified earnings. **The forum concluded with a unified message: when Afghan women connect globally, opportunities multiply, and meaningful change becomes possible.**

