

# **Sans money to buy food, medicines, Afghan sisters fight mother of all survival battles**

Pin Hopes On E-Visas For Safe Passage Outside as Aug 31 Deadline Looms Large

Beyond the images of hundreds of Afghans desperately clamoring at the Kabul international airport to flee in the war-torn country, there are thousands of women stuck in the four walls of their homes-- scared to step out fearing oppression. Inside they are gripped with fear, overwhelmed with worry over how and what to feed their children and other family members.

Money in the hand is becoming scarcer by hours as banks are shut. There is little dough left to buy food, medicines and even get mobile recharged to remain connected with each other and the outside world. This, even as the bigger sword of their safety and future hangs on their heads all the time.

SEWA's sister organization Sabah Bagh-e-Khazana Social Association (SBKSA) has 10,000 women members. Majority of the women are vulnerable young women and widows who have learned vocational training to become self-employed and self-reliant. These members, many of them master trainers now, recount the desperation closing in on them with every passing hour.

Sosan Gausi of SBKSA says the situation is grim. "Day to day survival has become a challenge. As the banks are shut, there is no access to our own hard earned income and savings or assets. There is very little or no money on hand to buy food. To survive, we have given up our traditional diet of curry, vegetables and roti and are living off naan, a flatbread and green tea. It breaks my heart to see young children survive only on naan and tea," says Sosan.

Hafizajaan, executive committee member of SBKSA, gave an insight into the imminent threat to women who have dared to learn some trade and become entrepreneurs. She, along with other trainer sisters had dared to step out of their homes to go to the training center in Kabul, exactly five days after Taliban wrested control of the capital.

"We women leaders wrapped ourselves in full chadri to avoid being spotted. The neighbours near the centre told us that few gunmen had come to the centre to inquire about it' activities. They questioned who runs the centre and why CCTV cameras were installed there.

Sosan said the sisters are feverishly hoping and praying to get e-visas to escape the country to a safe future. In this quest, an unstable connection to the internet-- their only connection to the outer world, and a future, is giving them jitters. "There is diminishing access to recharge coupons for the internet," said Sosan.

Sosan says that SEWA's Afghan sisters are hanging on to SEWA's support in these unprecedented times of uncertainty. "SEWA sisters are giving us moral support, guidance and filing our e visa form. We are desperately clinging to the hope that we shall be granted e-visas to come to India. It is our only hope for survival," said Sosan.

Needless to say, time is crucial and Afghan sisters are frantically putting their papers online to get a way out. Here, the recent announcement by the Taliban that the August 31 deadline for Kabul evacuations will not be extended has heightened their misapprehensions.

"Being the only earning member of the family, there is massive tension in my head to buy food and medicines for my family consisting of my mother and nephew. SEWA supported us in filling e-visa forms. My mother and nephew did not have passports and SEWA helped me to send an email to concerned authorities. Hopefully, this nightmare will soon end once we are allowed to come to India," said Hafiza.

Hafiza forwarded the request from Afghan sisters. "Sisters are praying for early evacuation of themselves and their families. The Afghan sisters would like to contact UNHCR in India. They are confident to find work and start earning income with their honest labour. All they need is a chance at survival and hope," said Hafiza.