



Afghanistan Education Situation Report 2025



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Girls leaving a primary school at Ghazni.
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Acronyms

CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
CBE	Community-Based Education
DfA	De facto Authorities
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
Ed-STWG	Education Strategic Thematic Working Group
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOSS	National Occupational Skills Standards
NSIA	de facto National Statistics and Information Authority
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PED	Provincial Education Department
QA	Quality Assurance
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVET-A	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
YALBE	Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programme



Executive Summary

Afghanistan's education system faces unprecedented challenges. While access expanded over the past two decades, restrictive policies, chronic underinvestment and recurring humanitarian crises have reversed much of this progress and widened inequalities. Millions of children, particularly girls, remain excluded, while the overall quality and relevance of education continue to decline.

Early childhood education (ECE) remains seriously underdeveloped, with less than 1 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 enrolled in early learning. UNICEF and partners are testing play-based models, but expanding these requires both policy reform and ongoing funding. Early childhood development (ECD) is similarly underfunded, with the

2022–2023 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) showing that only 29 per cent of children 3 to 5 years of age are developmentally on track. A UNICEF-supported parenting pilot in 2024 demonstrated promising gains but remains small in scale.

In 2024, primary enrolment reached 6.77 million, but growth stalled between 2023 and 2024. Boys' participation is increasingly affected by poverty and household demands, while gains for girls remain fragile and unevenly distributed across grades. The crisis is even more acute at the secondary level. Although Education Management Information System (EMIS) records show more than two million students, in reality, girls are completely excluded beyond

Grade 6. The subsector also struggles with chronic underfunding, shortages of qualified teachers, and inadequate infrastructure, which erodes quality and limits opportunities for both boys and girls. Girls' education overall has been severely impacted, with 2.2 million excluded. Community-based education (CBE), once a pillar reaching one million learners, is shrinking under restrictive policies. A new Learning Continuity Plan aims to facilitate children's transition into public schools while piloting community-based learning models that better align with national systems. Meanwhile, opportunities for skills development are extremely limited, leaving adolescents—especially girls—vulnerable to exploitation. Market assessments indicate entry points in health, nutrition and social services, but training programmes remain hindered by policy restrictions and resource gaps.

Learning outcomes remain alarmingly low. More than 90 per cent of 10-year-olds cannot read a simple text, underscoring one of the world's most severe learning crises. A large-scale Grade 3 national assessment, launched by UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2024/2025, marks the first systematic effort to generate evidence on outcomes and teaching practices. Teachers are central to addressing this crisis. The Teacher Development and Support Programme has expanded nationwide, incorporating mentoring, peer learning, and digital training modules; however, shortages of qualified female trainers persist. Infrastructure deficits further undermine quality: nearly half of schools lack safe buildings, 79 per cent are without electricity, and many remain without water, sanitation or protective boundary walls, discouraging girls from attending.



Significant changes are being planned for the primary education curriculum. In 2025, a series of official letters and decrees instructed schools to shift their teaching hours from languages and social sciences to religious, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and practical subjects. Implementation has been limited so far, but plans are underway to create a single curriculum for both general schools and madrasas. Under the revised curriculum, Islamic subjects will make up nearly half of weekly teaching hours. In public schools, this will mean more time devoted to religious education, while in madrasas it will ensure students receive the same amount of secular instruction as in public schools — for some students, this will be the first time they have access to secular subjects.

The education sector is also under severe pressure from overlapping humanitarian shocks. In 2025, an estimated 8.9 million children, including 888,000 with disabilities, will require emergency education support. Temporary learning centres and community-based classes remain lifelines, but the Humanitarian Response Plan is funded at only 22 per cent. At the same time,

mass returns from Iran and Pakistan have brought about 2.7 million people back since 2023, 40 per cent of them children. Many returnee children—particularly girls over age 12—struggle to integrate into schools due to infrastructure shortages and existing bans. This influx is adding further stress to a critically underfunded and under-resourced education system, adding to the number of out-of-school children and adolescents. Literacy remains among the lowest globally, with only 27 per cent of women literate. UNESCO's Youth and Adult Literacy Programme has reached over 56,000 learners since 2022, most of them women, but the scale of the intervention remains far below need.

Post-primary and tertiary pathways have contracted dramatically. Formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have stagnated at around 66,000 students, with female participation collapsing, while non-formal TVET has grown sixfold since 2019, reflecting urgent demand for livelihoods. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), together with partners, is delivering non-formal vocational and skills training, but this remains far below the scale of need and demand. Tertiary education has undergone profound reshaping: female enrolment has declined from 27 per cent in 2019 to zero by 2024, while male enrolment has decreased by 40 per cent. Faculty numbers have also dropped sharply, with female lecturers reduced by 70 per cent. Curriculum changes in 2025 eliminated hundreds of books and 18 subjects, including human rights, gender equality and political science, raising concerns about academic freedom and relevance.

While Afghanistan's education system is under extraordinary strain, opportunities remain. Protecting foundational learning, expanding access to safe and inclusive schools, supporting teachers and aligning skills programmes with market demand can bridge immediate humanitarian needs with longer-term recovery. Coordinated and sustained action is essential to ensure that every Afghan child and young person has the opportunity to learn, grow and contribute to the country's future.



A mother transfers what she has learned to her son.
©UNESCO/AKbari

Fawzia proudly shows the bag gifted by UNESCO to carry her books.
©UNESCO/Frozan

Overview of Education in Afghanistan

Afghanistan remains one of the most complex humanitarian crises globally, where overlapping political, social and economic shocks continue to deprive millions of children of their fundamental rights, including the right to education. Protracted conflict, widespread poverty, recurrent natural disasters and the effects of climate change compound vulnerabilities, disproportionately affecting children through malnutrition, child labour, early marriage and exclusion from essential services. Nearly half of the population—over 22.9 million people—require humanitarian assistance, with education being one of the most severely affected sectors.

The education landscape has been profoundly reshaped since August 2021. Since then, the de facto authorities (DfA) ban on girls' secondary education has excluded around 2.2 million adolescent girls to date, with a further 397,000 prevented from continuing each academic year. Beyond exclusion, this prolonged interruption has caused major learning loss, deepened inequities and threatens to undo hard-won gains. Combined with large returnee influxes from Pakistan and Iran, the fragile education system is experiencing unprecedented pressure. As of 2024, more than 2.13 million primary school-aged children remain out of school, 60 per cent of whom are girls.¹ Despite these pressures, UNICEF and partners have sustained primary-level enrolment gains for both boys and girls, preserving a critical foundation for learning continuity.

Afghanistan's education crisis, however, extends beyond access to severe deficits in quality and learning outcomes. While international aid to Afghanistan has enabled significant increases in access and quality of education since 2001,² learning poverty in Afghanistan is among the highest globally, with 93 per cent of children at the end of primary unable to read and comprehend a simple age-appropriate text.³ This is 35 percentage points lower than the South Asia regional average, signalling a profound crisis of 'schooling without learning'. The quality of education is undermined by acute shortages of trained teachers (especially female educators), insufficient teaching and learning materials, weak assessment and monitoring systems and widespread gaps in school infrastructure. Nearly half of schools lack essential facilities such as clean water, sanitation or heating, while over 1,000 schools remain closed due to conflict or damage. Climate shocks and displacement further disrupt continuity, exacerbating inequities in access and outcomes.

Equity gaps are stark across regions and population groups. Early childhood education (ECE) remains chronically underdeveloped, with fewer than 1 per cent of children enrolled nationwide and only 0.3 per cent in the north. Disparities persist at higher levels: in the south, just one in four children attends primary school, while in Urozgan, only 3.8 per cent complete secondary school compared to a national average of 31.3 per cent. Internally displaced children, returnees and those in remote or underserved areas face the greatest barriers to learning. Emergency education services, such as temporary learning centres, help fill gaps but remain far from meeting long-term needs for equitable and sustained access.

Structural and policy bottlenecks continue to constrain the education system. Sanctions have cut off international on-budget support, limiting the DfA's capacity to pay teachers and maintain schools. At the same time, the authorities have increasingly



prioritized Islamic education over general education, reshaping the sector's direction and financing. Declining international aid to education has further widened funding gaps for both basic human needs and emergency response. Combined with widespread poverty and restrictive social norms, these pressures reinforce cycles of exclusion. Harmful coping strategies, including child labour affecting nearly 30 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 and early marriage affecting 28 per cent of women before age 18, further undermine educational opportunities, especially for girls.

The crisis also extends to skills development, future learning and livelihood opportunities. Two-thirds of Afghanistan's population is under 25, yet 42 per cent of adolescents are not in education, employment or training (NEET),⁴ with girls disproportionately affected (68 per cent of NEET youth are female). Formal vocational training remains misaligned with labour market needs and largely inaccessible to secondary-aged girls. Alternative pathways, such as distance and informal learning, largely lack accreditation and are limited by internet and electricity accessibility issues, further compounded by the DfA internet shutdown order, limiting their value and scalability. While in-person learning for adolescent girls and young women does exist, the risks are significant given the active secondary and higher education ban and the restrictions on movement for girls and women. The disconnect between education and livelihoods perpetuates a cycle of poverty and exclusion, with lasting implications for national recovery and resilience.

Looking ahead, the education sector faces a dual challenge: safeguarding fragile gains in access while addressing the deepening learning crisis. Expanding equitable pathways for girls' education—while recognizing that nothing can replace face-to-face secondary schooling—along with strengthening community-based and alternative models and investing in teacher development, will be essential to restore equity. At the same time, improving foundational literacy and numeracy, scaling ECE, upgrading infrastructure and embedding skills development into learning systems will be central to ensuring children not only enter classrooms but also acquire the knowledge and competencies needed for their



future. Given the constrained resource environment for global aid, prioritization of interventions, coordination amongst actors, and innovative financing may be key to addressing Afghanistan's learning crisis. Afghanistan's aid architecture is currently under review to better align humanitarian and development (basic human needs) financing and interventions for impact and sustainability across sectors. A reimagined aid system in Afghanistan requires flexibility to respond to sudden-onset crises, such as the recent earthquake in the eastern region, while intentionally enabling linkages to medium- to longer-term support for chronic development concerns. Without urgent and sustained action, Afghanistan risks further entrenching cycles of exclusion, learning poverty and gender inequality that will undermine both immediate humanitarian goals and longer-term development prospects.



Strategies for Learning and Skills Development

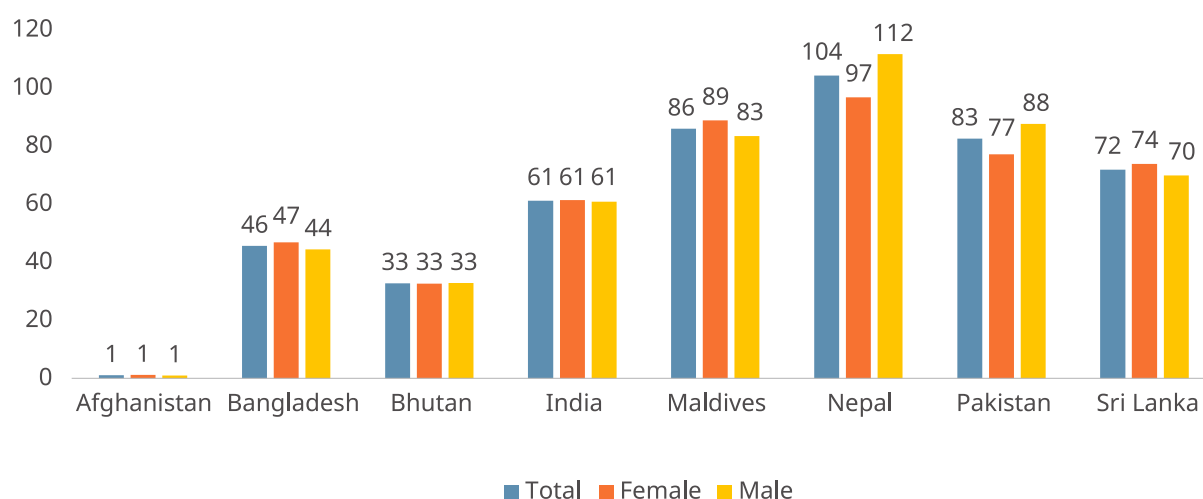
1. Education Participation

Early Childhood Education

ECE is currently not provided by the DfA, nor was it offered by the pre-2021 government. While some ECE classes run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operate under de facto Ministry of Education oversight—as with other community-based programmes—no official curriculum or policy framework has been adopted. Under the pre-2021 government, ECE was identified as an area of interest but never systematically developed.

As illustrated in Figure 1, approximately 1 per cent of Afghan children aged 36–59 months are enrolled in an ECE programme, with most enrolments concentrated in urban areas and showing no significant gender differential.⁵ The rates of ECE enrolment are very low compared to other countries, including those in South Asia. Yet evidence demonstrates that ECE strongly correlates with school readiness, increased enrolment and improved learning outcomes in primary school. In Afghanistan, linking a nine-month ECE class to a public school from the outset has proven to facilitate smoother transitions into formal education.

Figure 1. Gross enrollment rate, early childhood education, percentage, by gender and country



Source: United Nations Children's Fund South Asia, Overview of Key ECD Programmes and Support in South Asia, UNICEF, 2022.



Persistent challenges—including widespread poverty, malnutrition and limited access to health care and education (particularly in rural areas)—continue to impede progress. Despite efforts by organizations such as UNICEF and the Aga Khan Development Network to establish ECE classes, the sector remains constrained by ongoing sociopolitical instability and scarce resources.

Following the ECE programme assessments conducted in early 2024,⁶ UNICEF launched a quality-focused ECE initiative introducing play-based methodologies in selected schools and community settings. Insights from this pilot will inform the development of a new, multi-cohort, community-based education model, set to launch in 2026. These efforts aim to create inclusive, child-centred learning environments and expand access to education for the most vulnerable children. However, sustained investment, policy reform and multisectoral collaboration are critical to scaling up these initiatives and ensuring that Afghan children receive the foundational support they need to thrive.

Early Childhood Development

ECD in Afghanistan remains critically under-resourced and faces numerous challenges. The Afghanistan MICS 2022–2023 shows that only 29 per cent of children aged 36–59 months are developmentally on track. Developmental outcomes are positively influenced by parental education, household wealth and urban residence. At the same time, children in rural areas, those suffering from stunting or underweight, and those exposed to harsh disciplinary practices are far less likely to meet developmental milestones. Prolonged conflict, economic instability and limited access to health care and nutrition further exacerbate these issues, leaving millions of children vulnerable to developmental delays and poor educational outcomes.

In response, UNICEF has been piloting the Positive and Playful Parenting (Triple P) Programme since 2024—a home-based ECD intervention designed to strengthen parenting skills and support early learning. Delivered through parent-only, parent-child and home-based sessions, the programme focuses on responsive caregiving, early stimulation and play, especially for language acquisition, and toymaking to foster foundational literacy among young children. Mothers reported increased confidence, improved caregiving practices and noticeable benefits to both their children’s development and their own mental well-being. Families also received ECD and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) kits to support play and hygiene at home.

One mother reflected on her experience: “My children did not know anything before attending this programme. They have learned stories and rhymes; they play with dolls and are much happier now. One good lesson for me was learning how to make dolls from cloth and other simple materials. I also appreciated when the trainer explained that we should not use harsh discipline with our children. Talking with other women about raising children has been both helpful and fun.”

The programme’s multi-phased training approach enabled experiential learning and mentoring for the ECD workforce, while the multi-modal delivery

ensured better knowledge retention among caregivers. Designed with close attention to the local context—including mobility restrictions for women—the initiative, which is expected to reach approximately 10,000 parents by the end of 2025, has proven effective and will require an evaluation to gauge its scalability.

Primary Education

Primary education has registered modest gains in enrolment over the past five years, though persistent challenges continue to constrain sustainable progress. Trends—measured through three key metrics (enrolment, gross enrolment ratio (GER) and gender parity index (GPI)—are based on EMIS enrolment data and UN population projections, with important caveats noted below.

Between 2017 and 2024, primary enrolment rose from 5.9 million to 6.8 million learners, despite mid-decade fluctuations. Following a dip in 2019 and a period of stagnation around 6.0 million through 2021, enrolment climbed sharply to 6.7 million in 2023 and held steady in 2024. Boys remained the majority, though a substantive share of growth came from girls, whose enrolment increased from 2.3 million in 2017 to nearly 3.0 million in 2024.

These patterns are reflected in the GER. The overall GER peaked at 101 per cent in 2018, declined to 89 per cent in 2022, and recovered to 95 per cent in 2024. Male GER, consistently higher, fell from 120 per cent in 2018 to 104 per cent in 2024. Female GER, after dipping to 74 per cent in 2022, rebounded strongly to 87 per cent in 2024. Over the past year, boys' GER declined slightly, while girls' GER edged up, resulting in an almost unchanged overall rate.

The GPI shows the most notable shift. After remaining flat at around 0.68–0.71 from 2017 to 2022, it rose sharply to 0.81 in 2023 and 0.84 in 2024, suggesting that girls are gradually closing the gap with boys. Economic pressures on boys, combined with modest increases in girls' participation, have narrowed the gender gap.

Overall, trends in primary education present a mixed picture. Modest improvements in enrolment and gender parity mask underlying vulnerabilities. Male participation, though still dominant, has levelled off in recent years, increasingly constrained by poverty and household demands. Progress for girls remains fragile and is concentrated mainly in the lower grades. The stagnation observed in 2024 underscores the fragility of these gains and highlights the need to distinguish between reported enrolment and actual attendance.

Moreover, trend analysis over time show that demand for education in Afghanistan has remained strong, underpinned by twenty years of previous international investment in the sector, particularly bolstering girls' education. Surveys and real-time field data* conducted by EdSTWG stakeholders indicate that, across most districts, families continue to seek schooling for their children. Many communities continue to demand community-led solutions where formal schooling is inaccessible due to distance, financial constraints, or lack of teachers.

While the post-2021 policy environment has imposed severe restrictions on girls' secondary education, primary schooling has continued. Advocacy by education partners has been key to keeping this

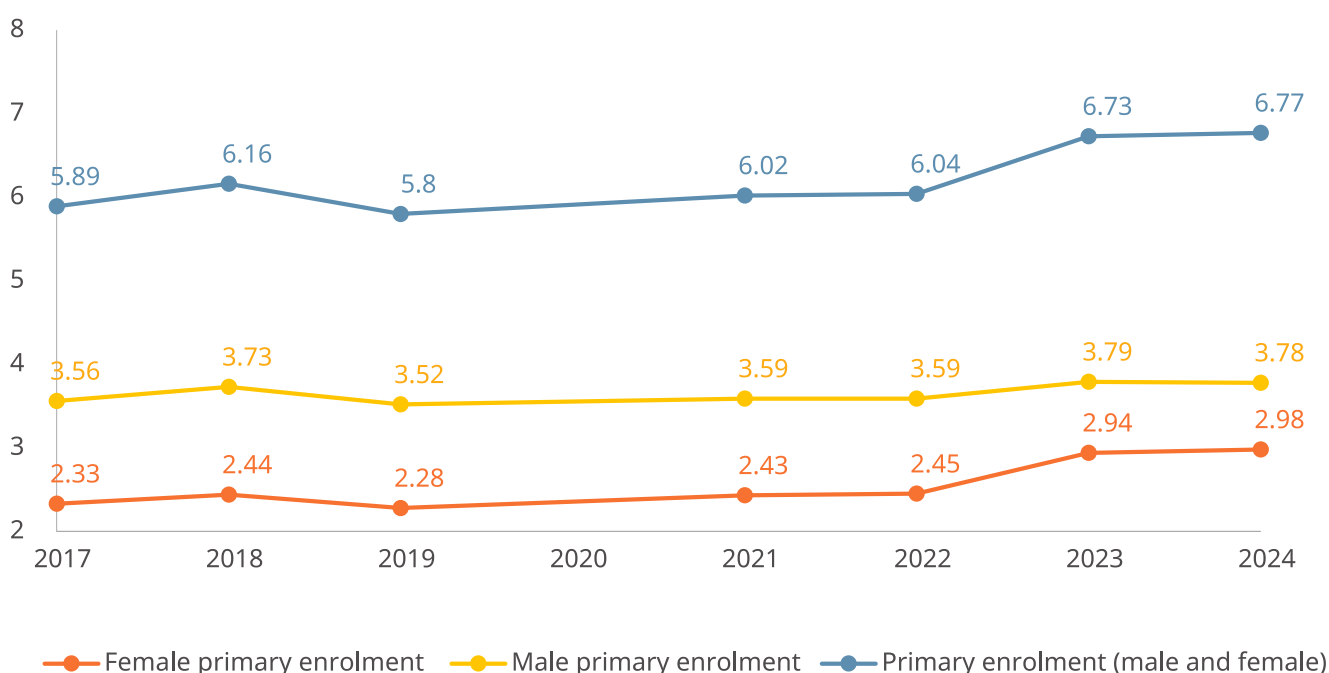


* CBE Transition Assessment (2025), Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (2024), internal monitoring data from Implementing Partners and UNICEF (2022 to date), UNICEF Census of Schools and Teachers (2022).

space open in addition to the peace dividend that has encouraged parents to send their children to school where previously the active conflict prevented this, particularly where children had to walk far distances to attend. After the takeover in 2021, partners prioritized public school teacher incentives and back-to-school campaigns, which were crucial to keeping children in classrooms. Continued joint advocacy also protected the role of female teachers. These efforts helped reverse the temporary cap on female teacher salaries which was instituted in 2024, allowing them to remain in the workforce. The regular payment of teacher salaries provided further continuity, insulating primary education from the worst effects of fiscal contraction and helping sustain enrolment gains for both boys and girls since 2019.

Since 2022, programmatic investments in primary education have further buttressed service delivery. The nationwide distribution of (pre-2021) textbooks and learning materials, the rollout of teacher professional development programme - especially valued for its focus on foundational literacy and numeracy and professional support for female teachers – has generated a significant demand for quality education. Additionally, the deployment of high-performance tents and school rehabilitation projects have all helped maintain safe learning spaces. These measures have supported enrolment recovery in many provinces. At the same time, community engagement through community elders (or shuras) has continued to encourage parental commitment and regular student attendance, even in the face of poverty and displacement.

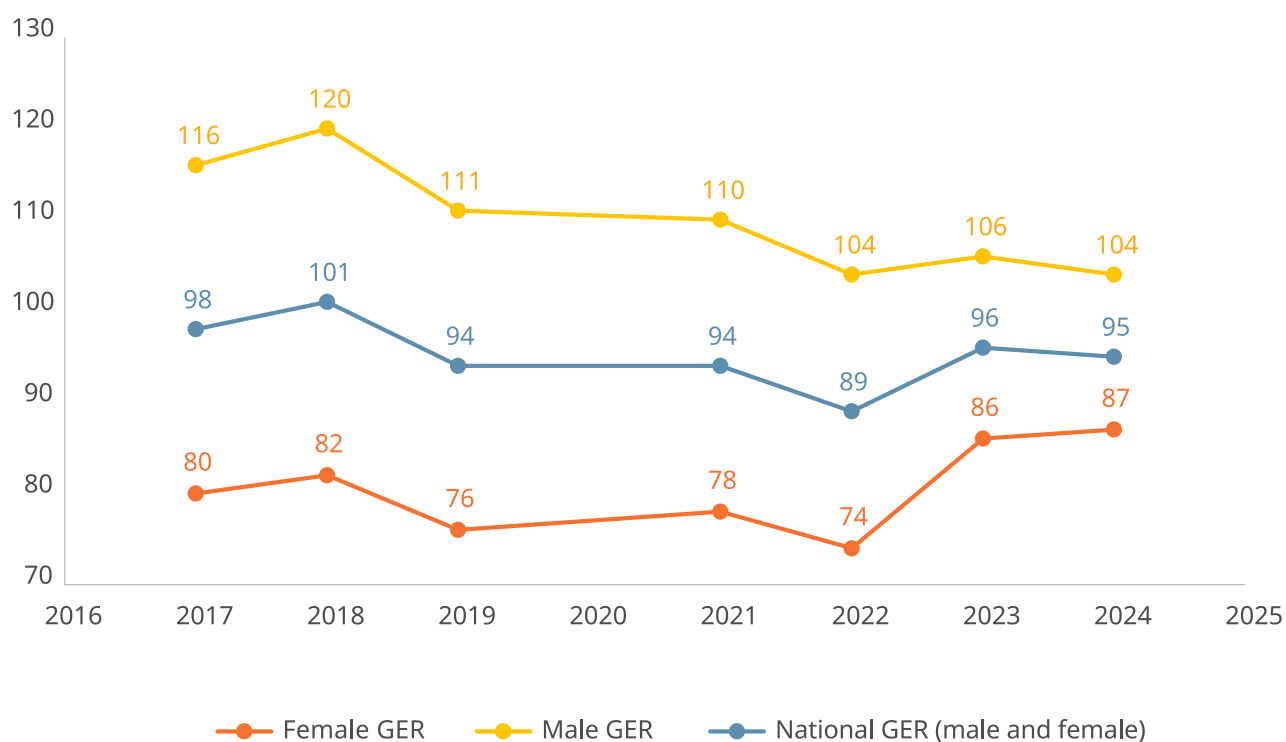
Figure 2. Primary enrolment trend analysis at national level, by gender, 2017-2024



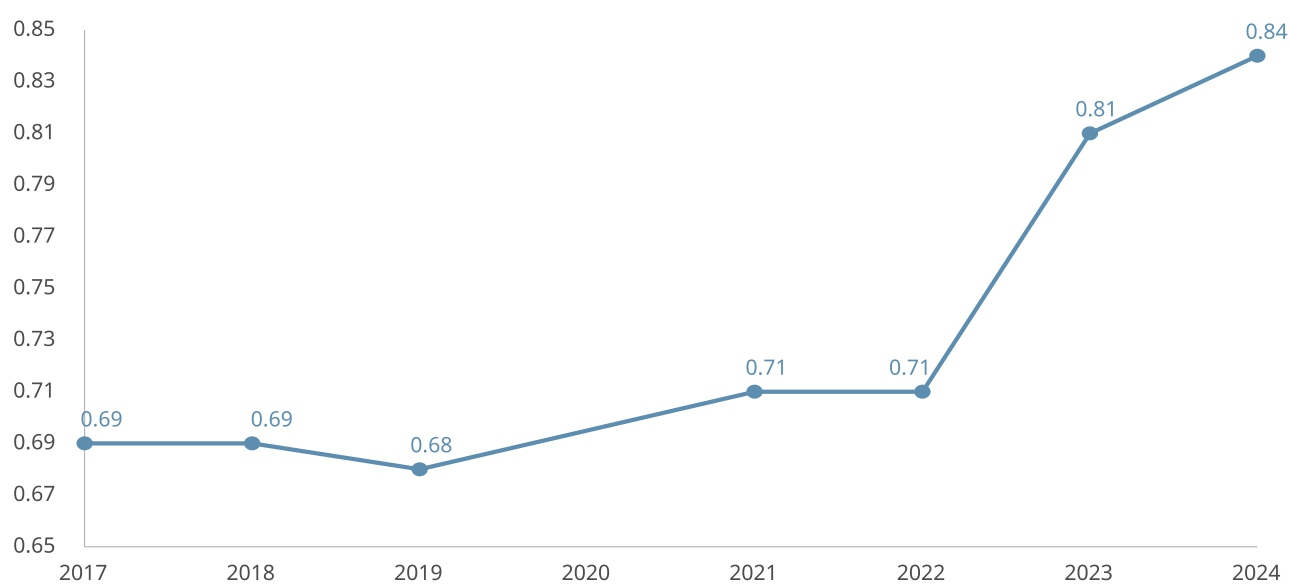
Data sources and caveats: The analysis in this report draws on two main datasets: EMIS enrolment figures for the numerator and UN population projections for the denominator. For the numerator, EMIS data were used consistently and validated against the UNICEF Census of Schools and Teachers (2022). Enrolment was chosen as the reference point rather than attendance, to capture all students who were formally registered at any point. A key caveat relates to the de facto Ministry of Education's three-year enrolment policy, which allows a student to remain on the registry for up to three years without being removed, even if no longer attending. This practice can artificially inflate statistics and should be taken into account when interpreting results.

For the denominator, UN population projections were applied in the absence of reliable official demographic data. Population figures in Afghanistan are marked by significant variation and inconsistency—particularly across rural and urban populations, internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees and other vulnerable groups. These discrepancies arise from the absence of standardized data collection methods and restricted access to certain areas due to security constraints. The UN Population Data Taskforce is working to address these gaps through triangulation of available sources.

Despite these limitations, the combination of EMIS and UN population data provides a sufficiently robust basis to illustrate and track underlying trends in enrolment, participation, and gender parity in the Afghan education system.

Figure 3. GER primary trend analysis at national level, by gender, 2017-2024

Source: The figure uses EMIS enrolment data as the numerator and UN population projections as the denominator, with the caveats on data accuracy explained in Figure 2.

Figure 4. Gender parity index for primary gross enrolment ratio, 2017-2024

Source: The figure uses EMIS enrolment data as the numerator and UN population projections as the denominator, with the caveats on data accuracy explained in Figure 2.

Barriers to Education

Afghanistan's education system continues to face deep structural challenges, with poor school infrastructure being one of the main obstacles to both access and quality. Despite donor-funded progress in recent years, nearly half of all schools still lack proper buildings, leaving millions of children to learn in tents, open-air spaces, or damaged facilities. In many provinces, classrooms are severely overcrowded, hosting 60 to 80 students per room, and schools often run double or triple shifts to meet demand.

The lack of basic services further undermines learning conditions. EMIS data from 2024 confirmed that 81 per cent of all public schools lack electricity, with rural areas disproportionately affected. Among the limited number of schools connected to power, most depend on the national grid, while solar and hydro alternatives remain scarce. As a result, most schools are unable to provide safe, warm and conducive learning environments, particularly during the

harsh winter months. WASH facilities are similarly inadequate: many schools lack safe drinking water, functional latrines and handwashing stations. Where toilets exist, they are often not gender-segregated, discouraging girls from attending. The absence of protective boundary walls poses an additional barrier, especially in rural areas, where parents frequently cite safety and privacy concerns as key reasons for withholding their daughters from school.

In response to these urgent needs, national and international partners have expanded infrastructure programmes, with a particular focus on primary education. Between 2024 and 2025, more than 525 schools were built or rehabilitated nationwide. These initiatives incorporated climate-resilient designs, safe WASH facilities and protective boundary walls, directly addressing barriers that disproportionately impact girls' education. Commitments for over 260 additional schools in 2026 and beyond represent one of the most significant infrastructure expansions in over a decade.



A group of Grade 5 students stand in the school yard of Soroubi Girls' School in Nazyan district, Nangarhar, Afghanistan. The school has seven classrooms, five latrines, a handwashing station, a boundary wall, a water well and solar power systems to light the classrooms. ©UNICEF/UNI755183/Omid Fazel

Despite large-scale interventions, critical gaps remain. For Afghanistan to deliver on the promise of inclusive and equitable education, partners must prioritize climate-resilient, gender-sensitive construction, expand infrastructure in rural and underserved areas, ensure resources for long-term maintenance and strengthen community engagement to safeguard and sustain schools. Only through coordinated and sustained commitment can every Afghan child gain the opportunity to learn in a safe, dignified, supportive environment.

Secondary Education

Secondary education in Afghanistan faces severe and compounding challenges. Following the ban on girls' attendance beyond Grade 6, most international development assistance has been withdrawn from this subsector. The de facto Ministry of Education, already constrained by fiscal limitations, allocates more than 90 per cent of its budget to teacher salaries under the Tashkīl,⁷ leaving virtually no resources for capital investment, school maintenance or the development of teaching and learning materials. As a result, secondary education remains chronically underfunded, with significant infrastructure gaps, an acute shortage of qualified subject-specialist teachers and a near-total absence of essential facilities such as laboratories, libraries and technology.

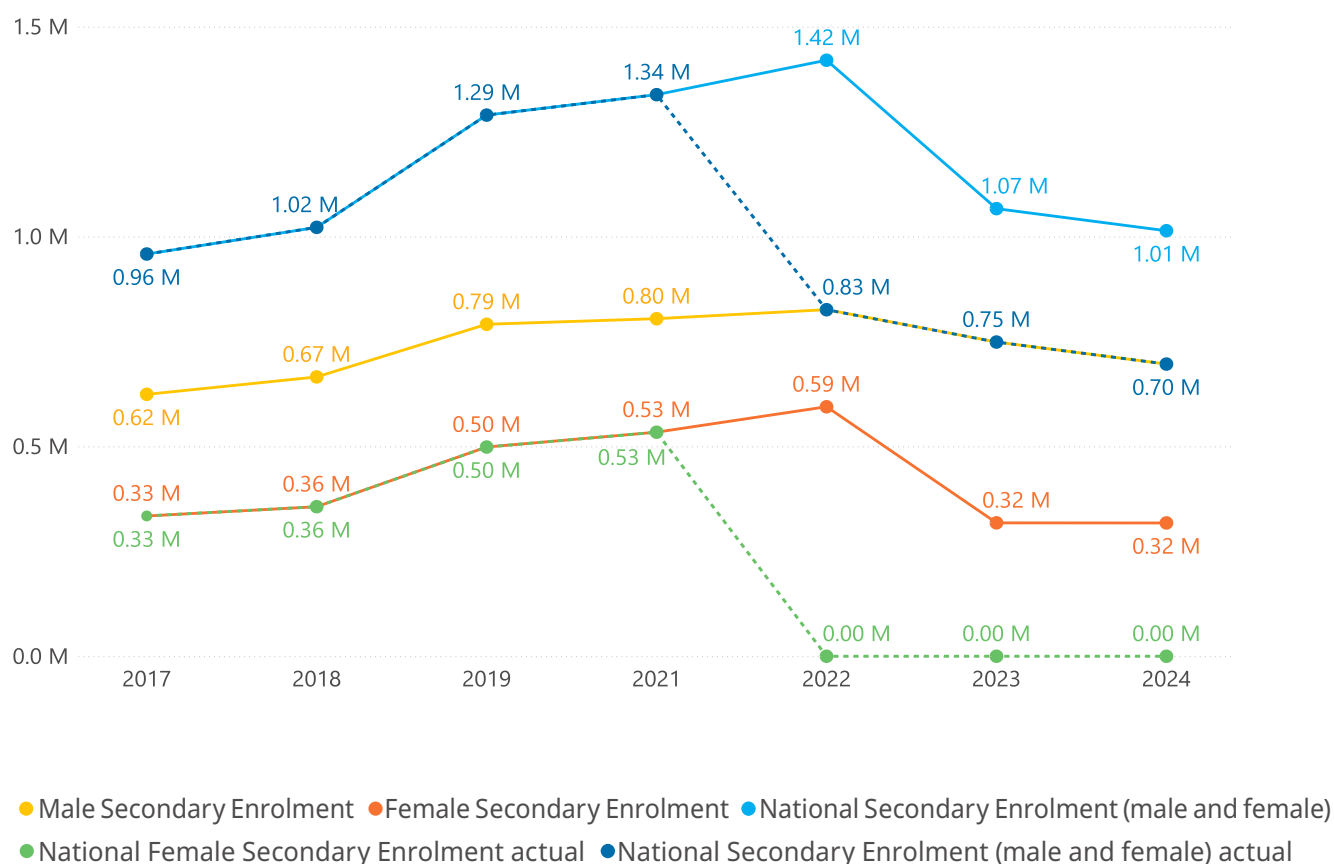
The combined effect of restrictions on girls and the withdrawal of external support has put the entire subsector at risk of stagnation. With almost no new investment, secondary schools struggle to provide quality learning environments, even for boys, whose education also suffers from a shortage of resources. This is especially concerning at the secondary level, where specialized inputs are vital for preparing students for higher education, vocational paths, and acquiring skills needed for future employability. Ignoring these needs has not only weakened prospects for ongoing learning but also reduced the role of secondary education in equipping adolescents with the skills required for active participation in the labour market, making this subsector one of the weakest parts of Afghanistan's education system.

As Figures 5 and 6 illustrate, secondary enrolment for boys remained broadly stable between 2017 and 2024, ranging from just over 1.07 million to a peak of 1.18 million in 2023 before decreasing slightly in 2024. EMIS data indicate that girls' enrolment rose from 640,000 in 2017 to more than 1.07 million in 2024, suggesting narrowing gender gaps and approaching parity. In reality, however, girls above Grade 6 are not attending school, and field verification indicates that their actual enrolment in 2024 is zero. The EMIS-reported enrolment is retained here to show how many girls would otherwise be expected in lower secondary based on past records, which allows the scale of exclusion to be quantified. There is also value in school principals, and by extension EMIS, keeping these girls in registers and official records: should the DfA policy on girls above Grade 6 be reversed, administrative barriers to re-enrolment would be fewer.

The GER follows the same pattern. For boys, GER reached 84 per cent in 2018 before declining gradually to 68 per cent in 2024. For girls, the reported GER rose from 48 per cent in 2017 to 68 per cent in 2024, but the actual figure is zero. Thus, while administrative data give the impression of steady progress, the reality is that girls' participation has collapsed entirely, and boys' participation is also trending downward.

At the upper secondary level, trends mirror those observed in lower secondary. Boys' enrolment rose until 2022 before contracting, while EMIS continues to report several hundred thousand girls in 2023 and 2024 despite their exclusion in practice. Because these patterns replicate the divergence already highlighted in secondary, separate Figures for upper secondary are not included. Likewise, the GPI figure for secondary has been omitted, as the index collapses to zero.

Together, these results underscore both the weakening participation of boys and the complete exclusion of girls from post-primary education, despite figures officially reported by EMIS.

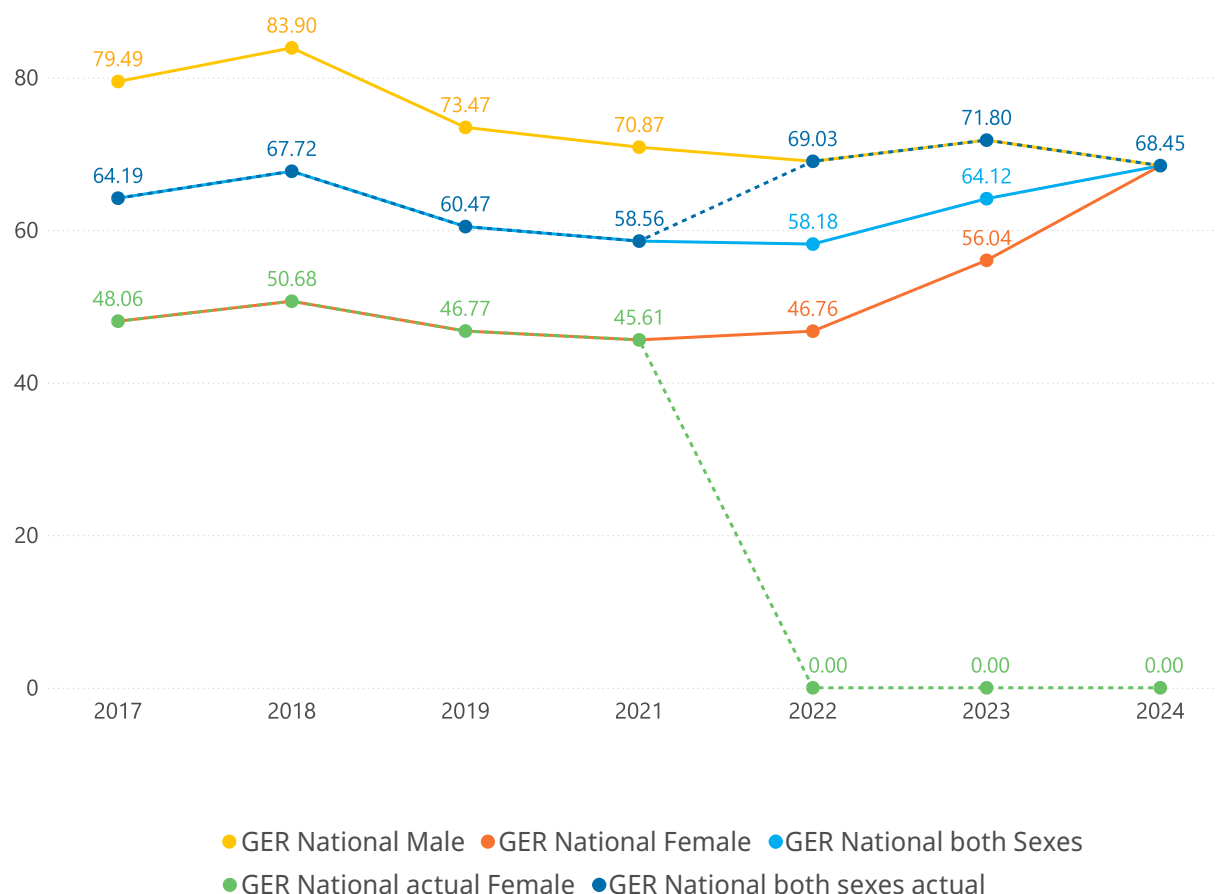
Figure 5. Secondary enrolment trend analysis (Grades 7 to 9) at national level, by gender, 2017-2024

Source: The figure uses EMIS enrolment data as the numerator and UN population projections as the denominator, with the caveats on data accuracy explained in Figure 2.

Within Figure 5, the solid blue line shows total enrolment for both sexes, the solid yellow line shows boys, and the solid orange line shows girls as reported in EMIS. In 2024, EMIS data (orange) indicate that 1.08 million girls were enrolled in secondary education, continuing an apparent upward trend. The dotted green line reflects the field-verified reality that girls above Grade 6 are no longer attending school since 2022, leaving actual enrolment at zero. This bifurcation visible from 2022 onwards explains the dotted blue line for the total: while EMIS reporting shows overall secondary enrolment exceeding 2.2 million in 2024, the verified total aligns with boys' enrolment alone at about 1.14 million. The divergence

highlights how EMIS figures suggest progress on gender parity, whereas verified data confirm the complete exclusion of girls and a contraction of the total secondary student population.

Within Figure 6, the solid yellow line shows GER for boys, the solid orange line shows GER for girls as reported in EMIS, and the solid light blue line shows the combined total. In 2024, EMIS data (orange) indicate that girls' GER reached 68 per cent, appearing to close the gender gap with boys at 68 per cent. The dotted green line reflects the verified reality that girls above Grade 6 are not in school since 2022, placing their actual GER at 0 per cent. This produces the

Figure 6. GER secondary trend analysis (Grades 7 to 9) at national level, by gender, 2017-2024

Source: The figure uses EMIS enrolment data as the numerator and UN population projections as the denominator, with the caveats on data accuracy explained in Figure 2.

dotted light blue line for the total. While EMIS data suggests overall GER remained stable at around 68 per cent, the verified GER reflects only boys' participation and is therefore lower. The divergence visible since 2022 highlights how reported data can suggest parity, while the verified situation reveals the complete exclusion of girls and a decline in overall participation in secondary education.

In the absence of access to public schooling beyond Grade 6 for girls, some families have turned to religious institutions, particularly madrasas, as

the only remaining option for girls to continue learning.⁸ While formally recognized within the education system, the ability of these institutions to provide a comparable education to secondary schooling remains limited. There are indications that the DfA may consider stricter enforcement of restrictions on girls' education, which could also affect their participation in religious education. This potential shift underscores the fragility of the remaining educational opportunities for girls and further heightens uncertainty over the future of secondary education in Afghanistan.



Girls' Education

Since August 2021, the policy environment has significantly reduced opportunities beyond primary education for girls, resulting in sharp declines in participation after Grade 6 and lowering the chances that completing primary education leads to continued schooling. UNESCO and UNICEF estimate that around 2.2 million girls were prevented from attending school beyond the primary level in 2024. This has created strong disincentives for families to enrol and keep girls in school, even in the early grades, increasing the risk of future declines from the 2019 participation peak.

The expansion of CBE and accelerated learning programmes has partially mitigated these effects in some areas, but cannot substitute for full system access. To support girls affected by the secondary education ban, education sector actors should continue promoting alternative learning pathways, including risk-informed home-based education. Digital and distance learning can play a complementary—though largely non-accredited—role where feasible, while never replacing the importance of safe, physical learning spaces.

Transition of Community-Based Education

CBE is formally part of Afghanistan's public education system but is implemented by NGOs and financed largely through off-budget support. The de facto Ministry of Education oversees the curriculum, teacher recruitment and exam schedules, ensuring alignment with public school standards. Since 2008, CBE has been a key strategy for expanding access—particularly for girls—and for supporting their eventual transition into formal schools.

CBE operates through two main programme modalities. Community-based schools provide foundational education for children 7 to 9 years of age who have not yet enrolled in school. Accelerated learning centres serve older children and adolescents, especially girls, who missed schooling at the appropriate age, enabling them to progress at an accelerated rate of two grades per year and catch up with their peers.

Since August 2021, many areas that were previously inaccessible have opened to aid delivery. In the immediate aftermath, donors viewed CBE as a comparatively lower-risk investment, prompting rapid expansion. At its peak in 2023, CBE operated 30,000 classes across all 34 provinces, reaching around 1 million children—60 per cent of them girls.

From 2023 onward, however, the operating environment became increasingly restrictive due to directives from the de facto Ministry of Education. In April 2023, a DfA decree closed all CBE classes in two provinces, immediately cutting off learning for more than 60,000 children. Soon after, the de facto Ministry of Education ordered the transfer of CBE management from international to national NGOs, followed by mandatory handovers of non-transitioned classes to Provincial Education Departments (PEDs). Many of these PED-managed classes quickly became non-functional, resulting in tens of thousands of children dropping out of school.

In mid-2024, new directives required the immediate handover of thousands more classes across multiple provinces to PEDs, potentially disrupting learning for over 120,000 children. While education partners successfully advocated for a delay until the end of 2024, the overall number of CBE classes still fell sharply—from more than 24,000 at the end of 2023 to around 21,000 by late 2024.

Donor concerns over sustainability, combined with an increasingly restrictive policy environment, triggered a strategic shift in 2024. Education stakeholders and donors developed a Learning Continuity Plan, setting out principles for systematically transitioning children—especially girls—from CBE into public schools over the next two to three years, with the expectation that CBE would be gradually phased down. Currently, no new CBE classes are permitted, except for those in limited emergency or returnee response situations.

In this context, education partners are introducing a new model of community-based learning designed to better align with national systems, strengthen school environments and improve teacher quality, while ensuring continuous learning for children who are currently left behind. The pilot will demonstrate how education can be delivered more effectively and sustainably.

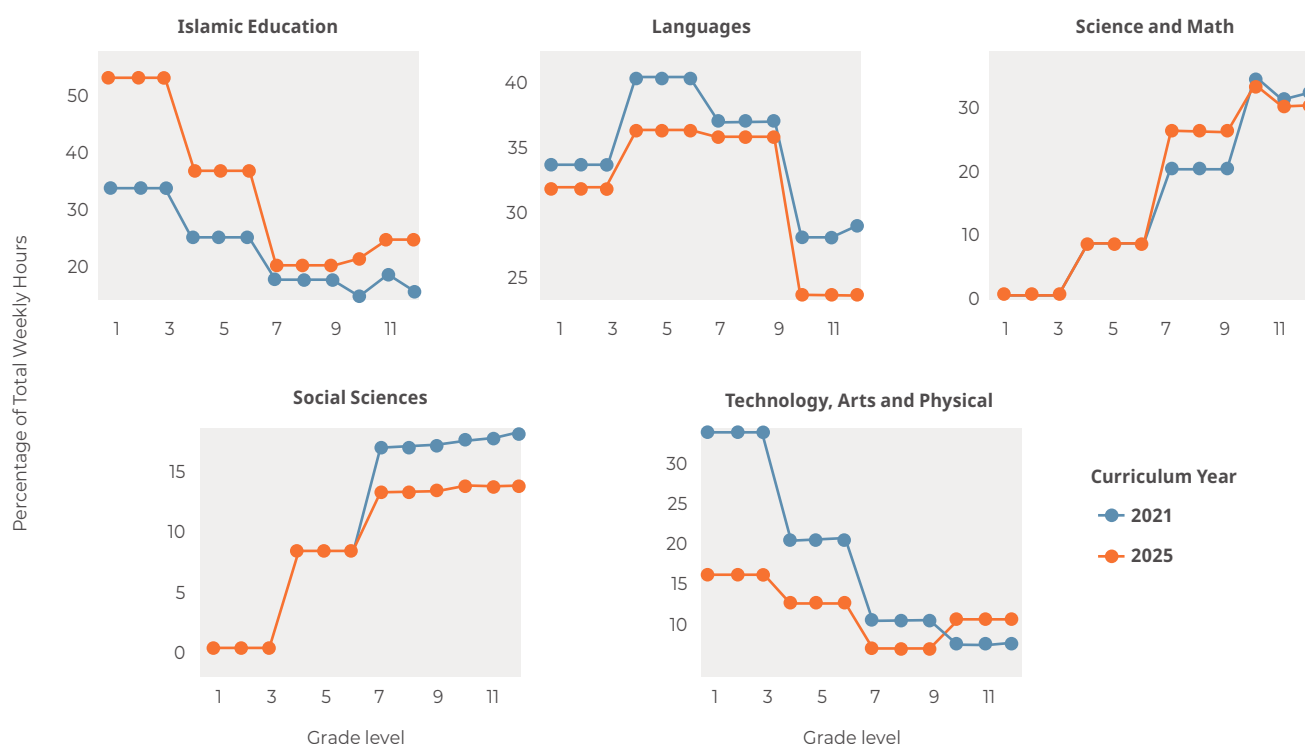
If successful—and with sufficient support from partners and donors—this model could provide a pathway for broader implementation, offering clearer standards and more consistent service delivery. By prioritizing urgent needs, the pilot aims to generate evidence on safeguarding and expanding education opportunities, particularly for girls and other excluded groups. Ultimately, this approach seeks to inform a more sustainable, system-wide transition and provide a lifeline for Afghanistan's large out-of-school population, especially first-time girl learners.

Curriculum Changes

In 2024, the de facto Ministry of Education began planning changes to the curriculum, educational materials and weekly teaching hours. A key development was the officialization of the revised curriculum in February 2025. Subjects including life morals and life skills (Grades 1–3), culture (Grades 7–12), civic studies (Grades 7–12) and selective subjects (Grades 7–12) were removed as they were seen to be misaligned with students' developmental stages, inconsistent with Afghan social values and irrelevant to the national university entrance exam (kankor). Instructional time in languages and social science subjects was reduced, with hours reallocated to religious, STEM and practical subjects. As of September 2025, revisions for primary-level textbooks (Grades 1–6) based on the new teaching plan have been completed according to the Curriculum Department of the de facto Ministry of Education, while the revision process for Grades 7–9 remains ongoing.



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Figure 7. Changes in weekly teaching hours by subject category

Source: UNESCO Curriculum Monitoring Report – Initial Findings (2025)

Although these planned changes indicate a clear direction, it is worth noting that the above information originates from UNESCO's review of official documents only. As per agreements with multiple donors, UNICEF conducts physical monitoring, including third-party monitoring, of public schools to verify the status of implementation of those plans. As of September 2025, no changes had yet been observed in classrooms around the country. UNESCO and UNICEF will coordinate for close physical monitoring at scale from the end of 2025 to verify when and how those planned changes are actually implemented on the ground.

A separate decree issued by the DfA in February 2025 mandates a unified curriculum for madrasas and general education schools for Grades 1–6. The proposed unified curriculum significantly increases instructional time for Islamic education subjects, which make up almost half of total teaching hours. This increase is offset by reducing instructional time for core subjects such as math, science and

social studies. New subjects, including tajweed, morphology, sirrah-biography and syntax, have been added to the timetable, likely with the intention of strengthening students' familiarity with language in religious contexts. However, due to a lack of practical guidance and resources, the proposed unification of primary education systems has seen little progress to date. There are also significant challenges in textbook development, as the responsible departments lack technical capacity.

Changes to the higher education curriculum were also made in August 2025. The de facto Ministry of Higher Education instructed all universities to remove 18 subjects, including civic education, gender studies, political systems and governance, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as globalization and development, philosophy and ethics and history of religions. A total of 679 books and learning materials are to be banned in universities for being in conflict with cultural and religious values, according to the DfA.

2. Quality of Education

Learning Outcomes

The World Bank defines learning poverty as the percentage of 10-year-olds unable to read and understand a simple text. In Afghanistan, the latest official learning poverty figure was 93 per cent in 2021—already one of the highest globally.⁹ Since then, school closures, worsening poverty and gender restrictions have likely pushed learning poverty even higher. While no updated official estimate is available for 2025, experts believe the rate remains above 90 per cent.¹⁰ The ban on girls' education beyond Grade 6, in place since March 2022, has excluded 2.2 million girls from schooling, further sustaining or increasing the learning poverty index of the country.

Despite significant expansion in school access over the past few decades, learning outcomes in Afghanistan remain alarmingly low. After four years of primary education, only two-thirds of students master Grade 1 language skills, and less than half achieve Grade 1 mathematics proficiency.

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted learning, compounding existing challenges. Although a National Assessment Framework for Afghanistan was developed in 2018 to establish a student learning assessment system, its strategic recommendations—such as a national learning assessment policy and implementation strategy—have not been realized. While some population-based assessments have been conducted in project areas, no recent large-scale, school-based assessments exist to provide system-level data on student performance and classroom environments.

The Afghanistan Education Sector Support Plan 2024–2025 underscores the urgent need for a robust assessment mechanism, incorporating summative and formative assessments, large-scale evaluations

and regular examinations to improve teaching and learning.

In 2024/2025, UNICEF, in collaboration with UNESCO, commissioned Afghanistan's first large-scale, school-based learning assessment, covering both public and community-based schools. The process began with the development of a learning assessment framework that included mathematics and reading assessments for Grade 3 students, an integrated teacher knowledge assessment and background questionnaires for students, teachers and educators. After field testing in 16 public schools, the assessment tools were finalized and are being adapted separately for use in community-based schools.

The initiative aims to strengthen the knowledge base on student learning outcomes and teaching practices through three key outputs:





1. Large-scale Grade 3 learning assessment in reading and mathematics, covering about 56,100 students in 1,870 public schools and 15,000 students in 500 CBEs across all 34 provinces, with an integrated teacher knowledge assessment to examine links between teacher capacity and student outcomes.
2. Mixed-methods positive deviance study to identify effective teaching and learning practices in high-performing schools and CBEs, generating scalable solutions to improve student achievement.
3. Development and dissemination of knowledge products, including technical guidelines on assessments, provincial profiles, thematic briefs and findings shared through sector platforms to inform policy and practice.

Efforts to measure students' learning outcomes at a key point in their learning journeys (Grade 3 is considered the stage when students should reach foundational literacy and numeracy levels) are critical to establish a reliable baseline and build national capacities to replicate the assessment in future years. In line with global best practices for improving learning outcomes, these efforts should be complemented by the systematic use of assessments for learning within classrooms and

at all levels. This refers to teachers regularly using a variety of formative assessments as a teaching strategy. Such techniques help track students' understanding and progress and are a fundamental step towards improving learning outcomes. They also play an important role in teacher training and development, as outlined below.

Teacher Training and Development

Teacher development and support remain one of the most critical priorities for the education sector in Afghanistan, reflecting the recognition that improving children's learning depends heavily on the quality of teaching. Persistent challenges in foundational learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy among early grade students, have underscored the urgent need to strengthen teaching quality.

Despite years of investment, teacher preparation remains inconsistent and very little information is available in the country's EMIS. Data gaps persist on teachers' expertise and subject-matter knowledge, including at the secondary level. [The UNESCO Teachers' Competency Assessment in 2023](#) assessed 617 primary school teachers from five provinces. The study found that participating teachers demonstrated generally low subject content knowledge in Science, Dari, Math, and Pashto. There was also significant incongruence between teachers' self-perception in teaching competencies compared to classroom observations. Pre-service training has been insufficient in preparing teachers for the diverse challenges they face in the classroom. Teachers need ongoing, practical and context-sensitive professional support throughout their careers. This realization has shifted the focus towards school-based approaches that integrate teacher development into the everyday realities of classroom teaching and school leadership.

The Teacher Development and Support Programme was adopted by the Education Strategic Thematic Working Group (Ed-STWG) to address this gap by integrating professional development into the daily activities of schools. Instead of relying solely on short-term training courses, the model emphasises

ongoing support through mentoring, peer learning, and regular feedback, positioning schools as the primary centres for teacher growth. This approach aims to be both practical and sustainable, enabling teachers to enhance their skills in ways that are directly relevant to classroom realities and informed by global evidence on what works to improve learning outcomes.

Since its piloting, the Teacher Development and Support Programme has expanded to cover all 34 provinces, supported by structural changes within Afghanistan's education administration. The transformation of provincial training colleges into professional development departments has provided an institutional anchor for the initiative and increased prospects for continuity. Senior teacher educators and teacher trainers play a pivotal role in this system, guiding both the delivery of training and the follow-up support that ensures new knowledge is put into practice, with some important emphasis placed on the use of formative assessments as a regular classroom practice. By drawing on existing personnel rather than creating parallel structures, the approach has strengthened local ownership, improved cost-effectiveness and increased the chances of sustaining teacher support in the long term.

The content of teacher development and support training has primarily focused on foundational literacy and numeracy due to the extent of learning deprivation in these areas. At the same time, demand for support in mathematics and science is increasing and is now being incorporated into training curricula. In line with global evidence on the most effective approaches to improve learning, training modules, together with coaching sessions and peer-to-peer support through teaching-learning circles in schools, have introduced scripted lesson plans, structured pedagogy, and targeted instruction as core pedagogical tools. Female teachers have participated at notable levels, despite barriers to access and mobility; however, the shortage of qualified female trainers continues to limit scale and equity. Closing this gap remains a priority, as female teachers are essential to sustaining girls' education.

The Teacher Development and Support Programme has also integrated the use of rapid student assessments to ensure teacher development is directly connected to learning progress. By focusing on Grade 3, these assessments offer snapshots of children's fundamental skills and produce diagnostic information that can inform classroom practice. This evidence-based aspect of the programme helps ensure that professional development is not done in isolation but is consistently guided by children's learning needs.

Alongside in-person training and school-based mechanisms, new methods have emerged to expand access. The introduction of the DANISH digital learning platform in 2024 has provided opportunities for teachers, particularly women in remote or hard-to-reach areas, to engage in professional development through self-paced modules and low-bandwidth communication tools. This marks a significant move towards making support more inclusive and resilient in a restrictive environment.



An experienced teacher, Nadia, got the opportunity to teach again.
©UNESCO/Frozan

3. Education in Emergencies

In 2025, almost half of Afghanistan's population—approximately 22.9 million people—will require humanitarian assistance to survive, reflecting both chronic vulnerabilities and the impact of acute shocks.¹¹ Education has been deeply affected by these conditions, as recurrent natural hazards, widespread poverty and restrictive policies continue to limit children's access to learning.

Flooding in 2024 accounted for 96 per cent of all natural disasters, displacing more than 173,000 people and destroying homes, farmland and essential services. Harsh winters, especially in mountainous and high-altitude regions, further isolate communities and hinder access to education. These hazards also directly damage school infrastructure and disrupt learning. In 2024, 18 per cent of households reported interruptions to children's education, largely due to windstorms and floods that damaged schools

and CBE classes across several regions. Economic hardship compounds these risks: 95 per cent of households reported experiencing economic shocks, with 11 per cent deprioritizing education as families struggle to meet basic needs.¹²

Against this backdrop, the education crisis remains acute. In 2025, an estimated 8.9 million children, including 888,000 with disabilities,¹³ will require education in emergencies support to sustain access to schooling and learning opportunities. Among them are 2.2 million adolescent girls who remain excluded from secondary education due to the ongoing ban, leaving all girls 13 to 17 years of age out of formal schooling.

To address these overlapping challenges, a multisectoral approach is crucial. Schools and temporary learning centres serve as vital access points for integrated services, including safe water supply, school feeding, child protection referrals and life-saving information. To maintain safe and functional learning environments during emergencies, temporary learning centres are set up using high-quality tents and equipped with essential teaching and learning materials. Within this framework, the Education Cluster—co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children—continues to coordinate and implement education in emergencies interventions. Efforts focus on supporting children in temporary learning spaces, CBE classes and hub schools, while also promoting alternative learning options that meet the needs of out-of-school children, those at risk of dropping out, returnees and children affected by natural disasters. Through technical and operational support to local partners, education in emergencies interventions aim to deliver a comprehensive, efficient, sustainable response that ensures learning continues even in the most challenging environments.



Returnee Influx from Pakistan and Iran

Afghanistan has been experiencing complex humanitarian crises for several decades, driven by conflict, political instability, recurrent natural hazards and prolonged economic hardship. As a result, more than 7.3 million Afghans currently reside in neighbouring countries, primarily Iran and Pakistan, seeking protection and livelihood opportunities.

In September 2023, the Government of Pakistan initiated the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan, resulting in the large-scale return of Afghans, both voluntary and involuntary, through successive phases. By April 2025, approximately 986,000 Afghans had returned to Afghanistan, of whom 87 per cent were undocumented. Children constituted most of this caseload, with 61 per cent under 18 years of age, while 17 per cent of households were headed by women. The situation was further compounded in March 2025, when the Government of Iran announced that all undocumented Afghans were required to leave the country. According to data from the International Organization for Migration, between January and August 2025, a total of 1.7 million individuals returned from Iran and Pakistan, of whom an estimated 39 per cent were children 6 to 18 years of age.

These returnees have settled in all 34 provinces, placing additional pressure on fragile infrastructure, overstretched public services, and vulnerable host communities. Most returnees, having lived as undocumented migrants, had very limited access to formal education in their host countries. Many of the children now arriving in Afghanistan are second- or third-generation migrants with no prior ties to the country and without established social networks to aid their reintegration. This further worsens their vulnerability and restricts opportunities for a smooth entry into Afghan society.

The response to the needs of returnees is structured around two main components. First, at border crossing points, partners provide immediate assistance, including information services, basic assessments



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and responses to frequently asked questions. Second, in areas of return, education partners conduct further assessments of children's educational needs and provide targeted support, including language acquisition, remedial education, enrolment in temporary learning spaces and facilitation of integration into public schools. Afghanistan's chronic lack of school infrastructure will continue to hinder returnees who wish to rejoin the education system, despite efforts by humanitarian and basic needs service providers. This is due to funding limitations and the inability of donors to invest in infrastructure within the sanctions environment.

Despite these interventions, the recent and unprecedented rise in undocumented returns has placed severe strain on Afghanistan's education system and broader service infrastructure. Returnee children face extremely limited opportunities to transition into formal education, with girls over the age of 12 facing additional challenges due to existing restrictions on their schooling. Many arrive in unfamiliar environments where they struggle to meet their basic needs, with little or no safety net. This large-scale influx has also overwhelmed border facilities, while ongoing funding gaps continue to hinder partners' ability to respond effectively and at the necessary scale.

4. Youth and Adult Literacy and Skills Development (Non-Formal Education)

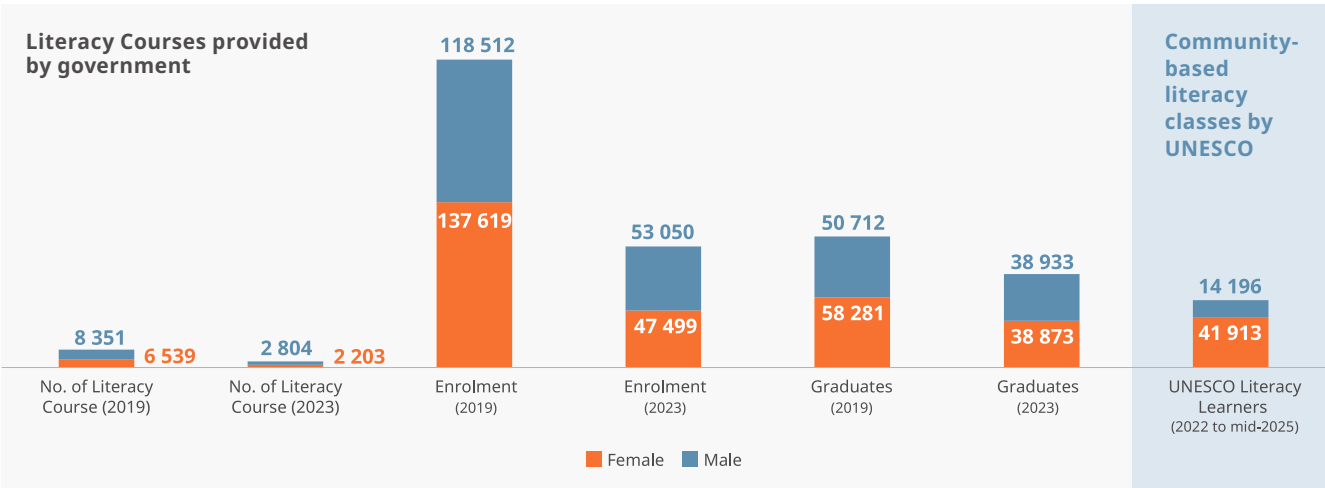
According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Afghanistan's national literacy rate in 2021 was 37 per cent, one of the lowest globally. Gender disparities remain wide, with 52 per cent of men literate compared to only 23 per cent of women. Rural literacy stood at 31 per cent, underscoring limited access to education in remote areas. UNICEF's MICS for 2022/2023 reports a national average female literacy rate of 27 per cent among women aged 15–49, with stark inequalities across provinces: Kabul, Bamyān and Balkh record the highest female literacy rates above 45 per cent, while southern provinces such as Kandahar, Farah and Helmand remain below 15 per cent.

A 2022 UNESCO survey across 14 provinces found that nearly half of public literacy schools lacked buildings, and most had no access to water, electricity or sanitation. Textbooks and qualified teachers—particularly women—were in short supply. While two-thirds of learners achieved basic reading skills,

dropout rates exceeded 20 per cent. These schools, once accessible to women, are now closed to them under current restrictions, underscoring both the fragility of provision and the urgent need to strengthen infrastructure and teaching quality.

Since 2022, a total of 56,109 learners have been enrolled under the UNESCO community-based Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programme (YALBE).¹⁴ Out of these, 53,860 learners completed Level 1 courses (equivalent to Grade 3 of general education) and 2,249 Level 2 (equivalent to Grade 6 of general education). Women represented the majority at both levels, accounting for 75 per cent of Level 1 graduates and 76 per cent of Level 2 graduates. Before August 2021, female participation was higher: in 2019, there were 58,281 female graduates (53 per cent) and 137,619 female enrolments (54 per cent). In 2023, both female and male graduates and enrolments dropped significantly.

Figure 8. Literacy learners in Afghanistan, by gender, 2019-2023



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Literacy Campaign Reports, Internal Report, UNESCO, 2025; and de facto Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Teacher development and quality monitoring activities under YALBE and the Skills Development and Literacy programme were also implemented over the same period. Between 2022 and 2025, 1,142 facilitators (828 female and 314 male) were recruited and received pre- and in-service training.¹⁵ Quality assurance mechanisms included enrolment tracking, academic supervision, gender-disaggregated reporting and assessments of learning outcomes. Field-level monitoring and surveys indicate significant improvements in learners' reading, writing and numeracy skills over this period.

Skills Development

Adolescents and youth in Afghanistan have very limited opportunities to acquire market-relevant skills, hindering their transition into safe and sustainable employment. Illiteracy remains a deep-rooted barrier that weakens the foundation for further learning, and girls and women are disproportionately affected due to their significantly lower literacy rates. These challenges are compounded by movement restrictions, stricter mahram requirements and bans on secondary and tertiary education, which further limit their participation in society and access to services.

These barriers increase existing risks, making adolescent girls particularly vulnerable to child marriage, gender-based violence and social exclusion. For many young people, the lack of accessible skills training pathways raises the risk of child labour, economic exploitation and hazardous work.

To address these challenges, a market needs assessment was conducted to identify sectors capable of absorbing new entrants into the workforce and that remain open—or at least partially accessible—to women. The assessment highlighted six priority areas, including health, nutrition and social services, which offer viable pathways for adolescents and youth, especially girls and young women, to acquire employable skills. By aligning training programmes with market demand, implementing agencies aim to equip young people with relevant competencies that improve employability while also filling gaps in essential service sectors.

The programme design is based on evidence from the market assessment, ensuring that training modules respond to changing labour market demands and are customized to local economic contexts. Skills development interventions also aim to complement foundational learning and basic education, providing continuity in learning while creating immediate pathways to livelihoods.

The expected outcomes extend well beyond employability. Skills training is envisioned as a means of strengthening young people's agency, resilience and social participation. For adolescent girls and young women, it provides a crucial platform to regain opportunities for growth and to contribute meaningfully to their communities despite prevailing restrictions.

Nonetheless, the programme operates within a backdrop of considerable uncertainty. Ongoing restrictions imposed by the DfA may restrict women's involvement in training or employment, while donor priorities and resource limitations might force difficult choices between investing in foundational learning and expanding skills and livelihoods opportunities. An additional challenge arises from donor tendencies to favour programmes that show quick or visible results, which can unintentionally divert attention and resources from addressing the systemic problems underlying the education crisis. Without sufficient investment in strengthening national systems, efforts risk remaining fragmented and unsustainable. Building a resilient, self-reliant education system requires long-term dedication, yet the current funding environment often supports short-term projects rather than structural reform.

At the same time, significant opportunities are present. Donor interest in skills development is increasing, and engagement with the private sector is creating new pathways to employment, including in sectors more accessible to women. If maintained and expanded, skills development initiatives can link immediate humanitarian needs with long-term recovery, fostering resilience and aiding Afghanistan's socio-economic stability.

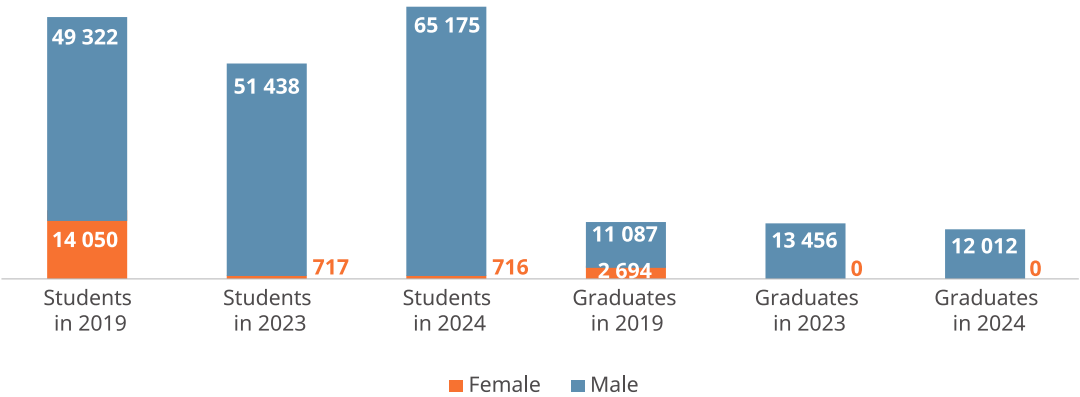
5. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

According to data published by the de facto National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) and the de facto Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVET), the number of public TVET institutions increased from 323 in 2019 to 357 in 2024, reflecting a growth of approximately 10.5 per cent over this period (see Figure 9).¹⁶ This growth was entirely driven by the public sector, which raised its share from 95 per cent (323 institutions) to 100 per cent (357 institutions). During the same period, the number of private TVET schools, which was 17 in 2019, steadily declined to 9 in 2023 and dropped to zero by 2024. This finding aligns with

UNESCO’s previous studies, indicate that private institutions are struggling to maintain operations following the ban on girls’ secondary and tertiary education, as they lose significant income from female learners.

The restrictions have had a direct impact on participation patterns. The total number of students increased slightly, from 63,372 in 2019 to 65,891 in 2024. However, this growth was entirely driven by male students, whose enrolment rose from 49,322 to 65,175. In contrast, female participation dropped nearly 95 per cent from 14,050 in 2019 to 716 in 2024.

Figure 9. Number of TVET students and graduates, by gender, 2019, 2023 and 2024

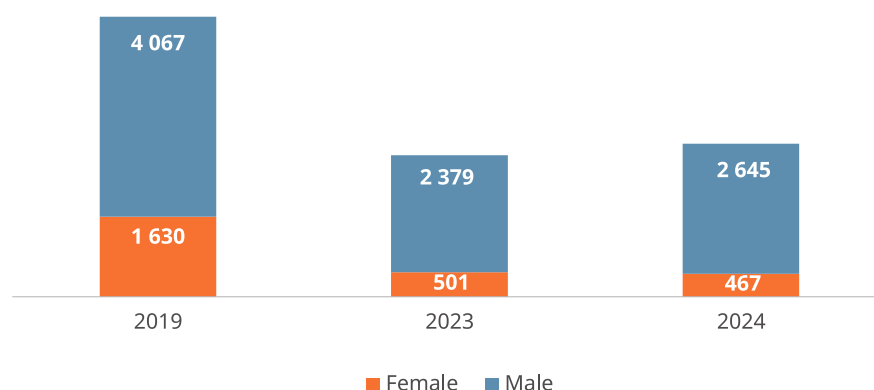


Source: De facto National Statistics and Information Authority (2019, 2023 and 2024).

The decrease in overall female enrolment indicates that students who were previously enrolled are not continuing with their education, emphasising the gendered implications of the restrictions.

In contrast to the increase in student numbers, the total number of TVET teachers declined significantly between 2019 and 2024 (see Figure 10). In 2019,

there were 4,067 male teachers and 1,630 female teachers, with females making up 29 per cent of the workforce. By 2024, the number of male teachers decreased to 2,645, while only 467 female teachers remained, reducing the female share to 15 per cent. This contraction in the teaching workforce has resulted in a sharp rise in the pupil–teacher ratio, which doubled from 11:1 in 2019 to 21:1 in 2024.

Figure 10. Number of TVET teachers, by gender, 2019, 2023 and 2024

Source: De facto National Statistics and Information Authority (2019, 2023 and 2024).

Non-Formal TVET in Afghanistan

Non-formal TVET provision in Afghanistan has experienced significant growth over the past five years. The number of people trained increased more than sixfold, from 13,319 in 2019 to 83,402 in 2023.¹⁷ In 2019, the sub-sector was dominated by donor-assisted projects, which trained over 10,500 beneficiaries across 14 provinces, alongside 2,819 people supported directly by the de facto Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. By 2023, donor-supported programmes and their results data were incorporated into the national totals reported through the de facto Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and TVET-A, with no separate figures available.

According to the de facto Government Media and Information Centre Annual Performance Report for 2023/2024, the de facto Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs delivered short-term vocational training programmes to 74,738 people, including 514 recovered drug users at the Pul-e-Charkhi Vocational Training Centre in Kabul, while TVET-A provided training for 8,150 people and offered entrepreneurship courses to an additional 100 graduates.¹⁸ In 2019, the de facto Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs supported 2,819 people by providing training programmes and facilitating



A learner practiced using the tailoring machine.
©UNESCO/Ho

their employment. Outside the government budget, 10,500 people in 14 provinces were trained through donor-assisted projects.

The recent increase in non-formal enrolment indicates a shift in demand towards TVET pathways, potentially driven by the pressing need for livelihoods and employment opportunities, coupled with growing concerns about the quality and relevance of tertiary education.

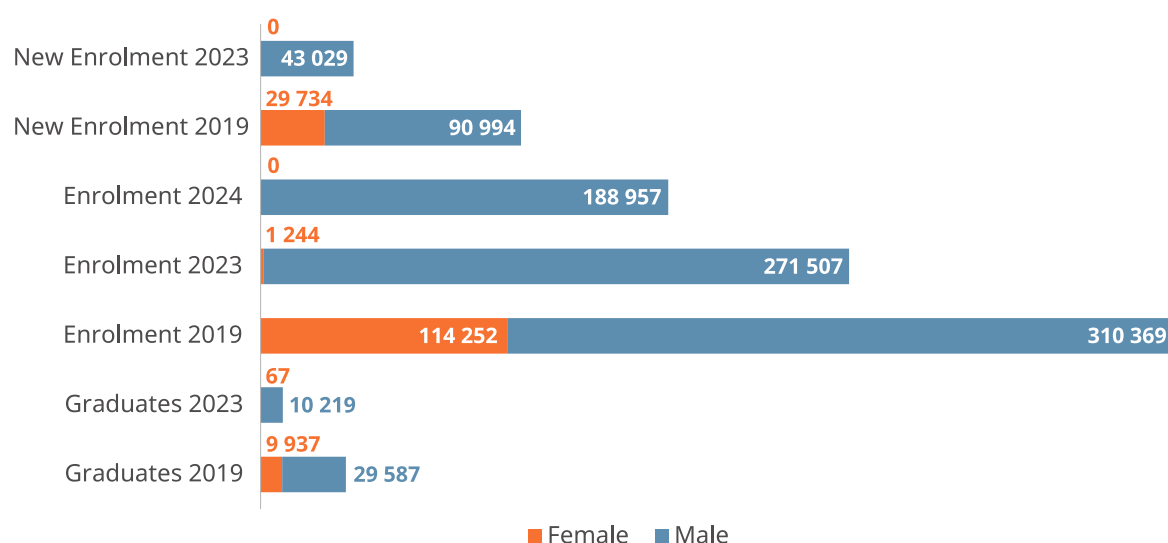
6. Higher Education

Between 2019 and 2024, Afghanistan's tertiary education sector underwent a period of contraction and disruption, with significant impacts on both institutional structures and participation patterns. The total number of universities slightly declined from 166 in 2019 to 161 in 2023, before a modest increase to 170 in 2024.¹⁹ While private universities remained predominant, their share decreased slightly from 77 per cent (128 universities) in 2019 to 75 per cent (121 universities) in 2024. In contrast, public universities grew marginally from 23 per cent (38 universities) to 25 per cent (40 universities).

Although these aggregate figures suggest only limited change, the underlying institutional landscape has been volatile. The de facto Ministry of Higher Education cancelled the operating licenses of eleven private higher education institutions across multiple provinces for failing to meet official standards. According to the 2023 UNESCO assessment of private universities,²⁰ many are experiencing severe financial challenges, including declining enrolments and unsustainable operating costs due to restrictions. Most of these closures are attributed to financial problems and a lack of students in the affected provinces. Officials from the de facto Ministry of Higher Education, however, also cited additional legal and administrative shortcomings as contributing factors.

Restrictions on women's education have significantly altered participation in higher education. In 2019, women accounted for 25 per cent of new enrolments, 27 per cent of total enrolments and 25 per cent of graduates.²¹ The ban imposed by the DfA on girls' access to post-primary education, including university studies, has greatly influenced enrolment trends. By 2023, these figures had dropped to nearly zero. Female enrolment became absent entirely, with zero new entries. In 2024, total female enrolment fell to zero, while male enrolment decreased from 310,369 in 2019 to 188,957 in 2024. The decline was also evident in graduation numbers, with females constituting less than 1 per cent of graduates.



Figure 11. Enrolment and graduation in universities, by gender, 2019, 2023 and 2024

Source: De facto National Statistics and Information Authority (2019, 2023 and 2024).

While the number of male students decreased in both enrolment and graduates, female students nearly disappeared entirely. Several factors have reportedly contributed to the bleak state of tertiary education, including the ban on girls' access to post-primary education, including tertiary education, as well as concerns over changes in the curriculum.

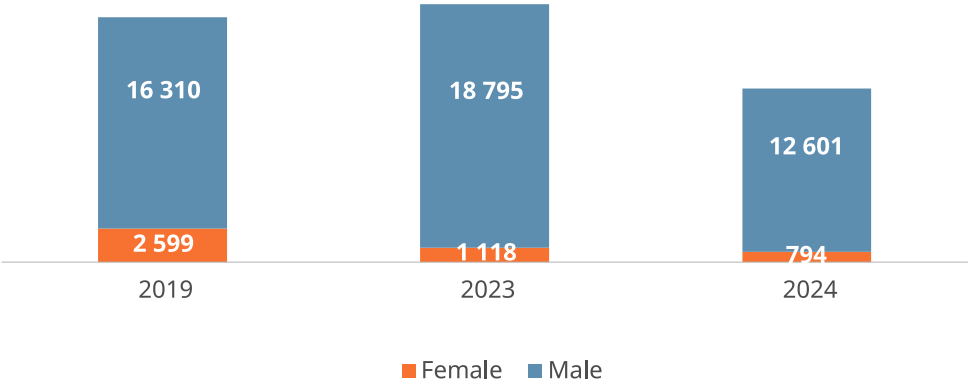
The Crisis Facing Female Lecturers and Professors in Afghanistan

The contraction of tertiary education in Afghanistan has also transformed the teaching workforce. Between 2019 and 2024, the number of university teachers decreased significantly from a total of 18,909 to 13,395 (see Figure 13). While male faculty numbers initially increased to 18,795 in 2023, the numbers later declined to 12,601 in 2024. The decrease was

even more dramatic among female lecturers and professors: their numbers fell from 2,599 in 2019 (13.7 per cent of the workforce) to 1,118 in 2023 (5.6 per cent), and further to 794 in 2024 (6.0 per cent).

In response to the severe challenges faced by women in Afghanistan, UNESCO surveyed 198 educators to develop targeted response strategies.²² The findings reveal a group of highly qualified professionals, most of whom hold master's or doctoral degrees in various academic fields, now experiencing severe financial hardship and poverty issues. An astonishing 98.5 per cent of respondents reported a dramatic pay cut, with average monthly earnings dropping from around 40,000 AFN to just 4,852 AFN. This situation worsens because nearly all respondents (91 per cent) are the sole breadwinners for their families, and all surveyed teachers reported having no other source of income besides teaching, which has declined sharply since the introduction of the higher education ban.

Figure 12. Number of tertiary education teachers, by gender, 2019, 2023, 2024



Source: De facto National Statistics and Information Authority, 2025.



Changes in University Curriculum

In August 2025, an official letter was circulated to all public and private universities across Afghanistan. The letter stated that several technical committees, comprising Islamic scholars and lecturers from relevant fields, had been established to review the current teaching and learning materials. These committees evaluated the materials based on their intellectual value, religious content, policy, cultural relevance and scientific accuracy. As a result, 679 books were identified, along with 18 subjects covering topics such as human rights, democracy, gender equality and women’s empowerment, policy systems and governance in Afghanistan, sociology, globalization and development.

All public and private universities have been instructed to eliminate the identified books and to replace them with other books that do not contradict Sharia and DfA policy until the committees propose new materials. The removal of books from the curriculum will significantly impact several fields of study, including international relations, political science and journalism.



7. Education Sector Coordination and Localization

In Afghanistan's complex and highly politicized operating environment, the Afghanistan Education Strategic Thematic Working Group (Ed-STWG) continues to facilitate technical, policy and operational dialogue among UN agencies, donors, international financial institutions and NGOs, both national and international. The group's overarching aim is to enhance the quality and coherence of aid coordination and engagement in the education sector, while reviewing and advancing sector strategy, coordination mechanisms, financing and implementation.

Key achievements of the Ed-STWG include the establishment of specialized technical working groups that strengthen coordination and provide evidence and reviews to the Ed-STWG. For example, the NGO Capacity Development Group coordinates joint efforts towards localization by supporting the capacity development of national NGOs, including through online training. The Teacher Development Support Forum coordinates and aligns teacher training, professional development and support across implementing agencies and relevant technical directorates of the de facto Ministry of Education.

Other notable coordination efforts include the launch of the Basic Human Needs Sub-National Coordination Initiative, which supports regional coordination, monitoring and reporting, and represents a concrete step towards integrating emergency and development programming into a single sector approach. Another recent example is the strengthened engagement with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), particularly to collaborate on advocacy and action for girls' education.

The Ed-STWG is also advancing coordinated strategies to mitigate financial and fiduciary risks associated with international aid funding in Afghanistan. The recent development of a harmonized framework on anti-aid diversion and sanctions compliance demonstrates this commitment.

Looking ahead, as international development aid levels decline, the Ed-STWG will prioritize innovation and efficiencies in implementation, leveraging the respective strengths of communities, national NGOs and the private sector. The future of millions of children and young people, who struggle to access services and opportunities, depends on all stakeholders working together to expand their reach and improve the quality of education delivery, including in emergencies.

Lima and her grade 3 students participate in a group exercise in their schoolyard. Lima says her teacher training course has helped improve her teaching methodologies and improved school attendance for girls. ©UNICEF/UNI796781/Khan



HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

Making classrooms fun through playful and interactive learning

"I always wondered how student performance in private schools is higher. What is it that private schools do differently?" says Sumbul Mohmal, school principal.

Sharing what she learned from a recent UNICEF-supported teacher training, she reflects, "Now we know – it is not only administrative tools like lesson planning, but also creative teaching methodologies. In just one month since the training, we have witnessed a 5 per cent increase in class attendance."

An estimated 4 million children in Afghanistan are reported to be out of school. Many are unable to attend due to a lack of proper school buildings, safe water and clean sanitation facilities, as well as a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly

women. Children often drop out due to economic barriers, sometimes being forced into child labour to help their families earn an income.

Lima is the class teacher for Grade 3 girls at her school. She teaches all seven subjects to the same class, leading different subjects on different days. She will move with the girls through the grades, teaching them all the way up through Grade 6.

Lima started teaching shortly after earning her bachelor's degree, but she had not received formal training in education. She did her best but was not always a confident teacher. "When we first heard about the teacher training programme, we thought of it as a promising opportunity. We thought it would only present teaching methodologies, but it was much more than that," says Lima.

"I taught these girls when they were in Grade 2. Now I am with them for Grade 3, as well," says Lima.

While speaking, Lima oversees a learning activity, watching her students put a colourful chart on the blackboard that they prepared for the upcoming lesson. "In our training, we learned to recreate and prepare materials that are inclusive and interesting for all students, despite their varying learning capacities and levels. My favourite activities are 'guess what is in your bag' and 'onion circle'."

"Before the training, we would prepare class assessments every week and assess every child individually. It was tiresome and added to the high burden of class management. The assessment games and activities I learned during my teacher training save me time; they are engaging and fun for the children and help improve learning," says Lima.

With support from Japan and the Republic of Korea, UNICEF has trained teachers and teacher educators in several provinces in Afghanistan. Training modules include improved teaching methodologies, preparing lesson plans, inclusive learning, classroom management and enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy.



Lima applies new teaching methodologies in her lessons and enhances class attendance for girls in Afghanistan.
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Lima leads an interactive learning exercise in her Grade 3 class.
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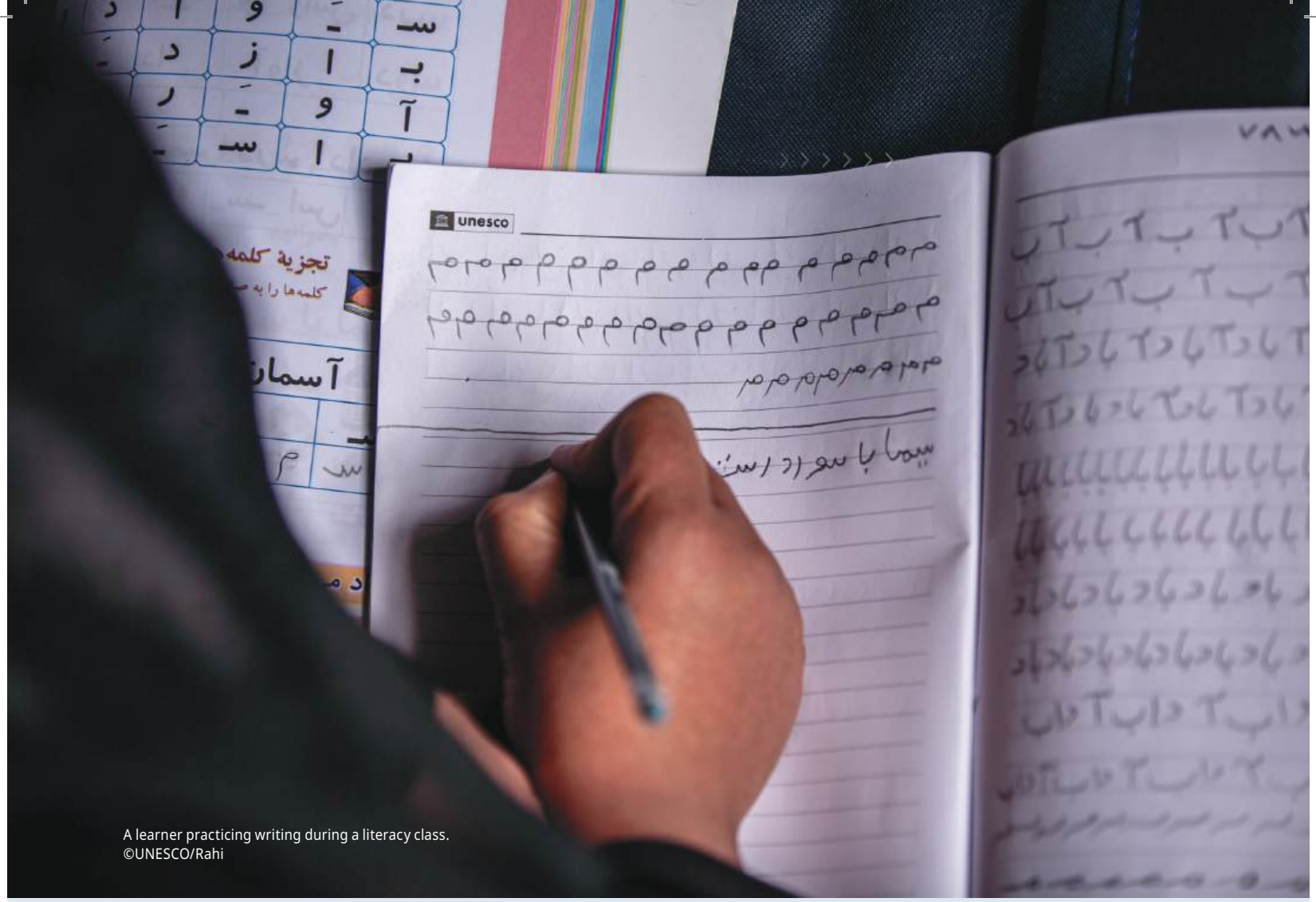
UNICEF specifically focuses on female educators, as having more women as primary teachers helps boost school attendance for girls, since parents often believe it is more culturally suitable for their daughters to be taught by a woman. "I have always liked naughty students, and never resorted to punishment of any sort," says Lima.

"My training course reinforced my belief that naughty children are often very intelligent; they just need positive engagement and redirection. For students who are unable to perform, I work with them individually and engage with their families to help them improve."

"Primary education is a critical foundation for a child's life," says Lima.

"As teachers, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to shape these students into bright, positive and progressive adults who can contribute in building healthy societies and lives," Lima continues.

"Every student is my success. Seeing them succeed on their learning journeys makes me very proud."

A photograph showing a person's hand writing on a lined notebook. The notebook has a UNESCO logo and the word 'unesco' printed on it. The writing is in Persian script. In the background, there is a colorful chart with Persian letters and a book with Persian text. The person is wearing a dark jacket.

A learner practicing writing during a literacy class.
©UNESCO/Rahi

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

A mother's journey of learning and empowerment through literacy in Afghanistan

In a small home on the outskirts of Kabul, Maryam was helping her second daughter with her homework. It was almost sunset time as they sat by the wall and looked at the questions together. As a mother of six, Maryam spends most of her day caring for her children. It is not an easy job, but she never saw it as a burden because of her love for her children.

Maryam did not know how to read and write when she first became a mother. When her eldest daughter was seven months old, the child suffered from a high fever and body

tremors. Not knowing what to do, Maryam took her daughter to search for a nearby hospital. They walked and walked, but failed to find the hospital because Maryam could not read the signs.

Feeling devastated, Maryam asked a boy for help. He laughed and said, "You are standing right in front of a hospital, and can't you see it?". Maryam immediately took her daughter inside, feeling sad and disappointed in herself. She wished she had known how to read and write.

“I want to learn how to read and write so that I can provide better care for my children.”

One day, Maryam heard about a literacy programme in the community. She immediately signed up and started attending the classes. “I want to learn how to read and write so that I can provide better care for my children,” she said.

Now, Maryam can read the signs of hospitals and pharmacies. She can also help her children with their schoolwork and explain topics to them at home. “I am so grateful for the opportunity for my mother to learn how to read and write,” her second daughter said as they finished their schoolwork session for the day.

For decades, the literacy rate in Afghanistan has remained low. Only 27 per cent of Afghan women are literate, among the lowest in the world. Education and literacy have transformative impacts on women's lives. Educated women are empowered to make positive contributions to the development of the economy, health system and overall societal progress.

Over 56,000 youths and adolescents, over 68 per cent of whom are women and adolescent girls, are benefitting from UNESCO's community-based literacy and pre-vocational training delivered by UNESCO-trained literacy facilitators in Afghanistan.

Other human interest stories

- **Promise of a progressive future:** Marwa, a young lawyer turned teacher, brings new learning ideas to her class thanks to teacher development courses supported by UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education
- **Reconstructing her happy place:** Amena's school was a bastion of delight and discovery, until it washed away in last year's floods. But this year, it is the first of hundreds to be rebuilt
- **Keeping hope alive in Afghanistan's community classes:** How UNICEF's partnership with the European Union brings pencils, notebooks, backpacks, trained teachers and more to classrooms in the remotest villages
- **Social and Emotional Learning for happier classrooms in Afghanistan**
- **Blended pedagogy for more efficient learning in Afghanistan**

Endnotes

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- ²¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Cost of Continued Suspension of Women's Access to Higher Education and Work in Afghanistan, UNESCO, 2023.
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- ²³ No certification is provided given that the DfA do not recognize these programmes. Pathways to accreditation outside of Afghanistan continue to be explored by both UNICEF and UNESCO.
- ²⁴ Learning Passport is a UNICEF and Microsoft product. Dana has been contextualized for Afghanistan and is available in Dari and Pashto. Digital content is also uploaded to YouTube and Facebook.





Credits

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