

EXCLUDED AND
DEPRIVED:
**THE EDUCATIONAL
CRISIS FOR WOMEN
AND GIRLS IN
AFGHANISTAN**

NOVEMBER, 2024



رواداری
RAWADARI

Rawadari is an Afghan human rights organisation that aims to deepen and grow the human rights culture of Afghanistan, ultimately reducing the suffering of all Afghans, especially women and girls. Rawadari helps build an Afghan human rights movement, monitors human rights violations, and pursues justice and accountability for violations. Rawadari works with individuals and collectives inside and outside Afghanistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, Afghanistan is the only country in the world where women and girls are banned from access to secondary and higher education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has stated that in three years since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, more than 1.4 million eligible girls have been deliberately prevented from attending school.¹



This report analyzes the impact of the Taliban's return to power on Afghan women's right to education, as well as the most significant developments in the country's education system since August 2021, including limitations regarding access, curriculum and alternatives sought by families to formal education.

The report aims to shed light on the legal and human rights dimensions of the Taliban's discriminatory policies and actions that deliberately deprive women of their right to education. The report also sheds light on Taliban's efforts to steer the educational system in an ideological direction that may have long-term impact on the Afghan society as a whole and particularly on the status of women's and girls' rights. The report includes information and analysis on the Taliban's gradual, systematic, and targeted steps to strip women and girls of their right to education; the intensification of restrictions in educational institutions following the enactment of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) law, also known as "Morality Law"; the changes made to school and university curricula; inspections of school and university libraries and selective purging of books and a brief section on the status of access to education for girls and women with disability.

¹ UNESCO "Afghanistan: 1.4 Million Girls still banned from school by de facto Authorities" (15 August 2024), <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/afghanistan-14-million-girls-still-banned-school-de-facto-authorities>



METHODOLOGY



A team of data providers gathered information and data for this report in 26 provinces of Afghanistan². The team conducted in person and phone interviews with women and girl deprived of the right to education, women and girls who were victims of domestic violence, journalists, civil society activists, human rights defenders, healthcare providers, school and university teachers, students, lawyers, and staff from relevant international organizations.

The data collection and interviews were conducted with the guidance of Rawadari's core research and documentation team. To ensure the validity and reliability of the information obtained from the local sources, the researchers compared and verified the findings against decisions, decrees, orders, and other written documents issued by the Taliban regarding education as well reporting by other human rights and media organizations. To ensure the safety of interviewees and sources, dates and specific details about the locations of certain incidents have been intentionally withheld from the report.

Additionally, the report is informed by literature review of existing documents and research on education in Afghanistan. The research and documentation team consulted previous reports by Rawadari, as well as reports and research published by human rights organizations and media outlets on the status of women's education in Afghanistan since 15 August 2021. Additionally, pre-Taliban laws and reports from the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and relevant international organizations were reviewed to better contextualize the changes made by the Taliban.

LIMITATIONS

Access to information in Afghanistan has become increasingly difficult due to the strict restrictions imposed by the Taliban. They prevent the dissemination of any information that relates to human rights violations by creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. The General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), the departments of the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV), the Directorate of Information and Culture, and the offices of provincial governors all play roles in enforcing restrictions³ on access to information. Collecting information on the human rights situation of women and girls is particularly challenging due to the Taliban's restrictions on women's movement and the erasure of women from public spaces.



Since the announcement of the PVPV law or 'Morality Law' there is increased fear and compliance with the Taliban's repressive restrictions. For example, interviewees have told Rawadari that the Taliban will punish journalists, media outlets and citizens who attempt to record and broadcast the voice of a woman or girl.

² Kabul, Maidan-Wardak, Logar, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Ghor, Herat, Badghis, Nimruz, Farah, Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Khost, Paktika, Paktia, Panjshir, Parwan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Takhar and Badakhshan

³ Rawadari, "The Afghanistan Mid-year Human Rights Situation Report January- Jun 30 2024", <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>



Prior to this, in several provinces, the Taliban had threatened local media and journalists, warning that if they publish information on the situation of Afghan women, their media outlets will be shut down, and they will be imprisoned. According to the interviewees, the Taliban even monitor phone calls and social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram to ensure that incidents of human rights violations are neither recorded nor shared. Consequently, Rawadari has faced serious restrictions while gathering information for this report, including challenges in interviewing women in various parts of the country and obtaining details on the curricula of religious schools/madrasas run by the Taliban.

GUARANTEE OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTS

The right to education, recognized as one of the most fundamental human rights and a prerequisite for enjoying other rights and freedoms, has been declared and guaranteed in numerous international documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, states that everyone has the right to education, and access to education, at least at the elementary level, should be free for all. This declaration also emphasizes the necessity of compulsory elementary education and the accessibility of other forms of education, including technical and vocational training, for all individuals⁴.

Similarly, Article 13, Paragraph 2(a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes free and compulsory primary education⁵. Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also recognizes the right to education for all children, regardless of ethnic, religious, gender, or other affiliations, and specify that equal opportunities must be ensured, including making primary education compulsory and free for all⁶. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) emphasizes the need to provide equal conditions for access to primary, general, technical, vocational, and higher education, as well as to programs designed to rapidly reduce the educational gap between women and men⁷. Furthermore, the Convention Against Discrimination in Education strictly prohibits any form of distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on gender, among other factors, at all stages and levels of education⁸.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 26, Claus 1, (16 December 1966) & Universal Declaration of Human rights, (16 December 1948), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁵ UNGA, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (16 December 1966): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

⁶ UNGA, International Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) : <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁷ UNGA, International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (18 December 1979) : <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

⁸ UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Convention against Discrimination in Education, Article 1, Paragraph 1 (14 December 1960) <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/convention-against-discrimination>



STATE OBLIGATIONS REGARDING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In light of the above, international law has defined obligations and responsibilities that states must uphold after acceding to international human rights instruments and treaties. The first duty and obligation of member states is to “respect human rights,” meaning that these states must refrain from interfering with or limiting access to human rights. The second obligation is to “protect human rights,” which requires states to protect individuals from human rights violations. The third obligation is the “responsibility to fulfill,” which mandates that states take and implement measures to facilitate the enjoyment of human rights⁹.

These obligations are also applicable to the right to education, and based on this, the primary responsibilities of states include directly providing education, enacting and adopting laws in alignment with international treaties, and taking action to support victims and facilitate individuals’ access to this right¹⁰.

Afghanistan has acceded to several international instruments¹¹, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which guarantee the right to education. Consequently, the Taliban, as the de-facto authorities, hold a legal responsibility to implement the provisions in these documents.

BACKGROUND

The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan mandated that the state “shall observe the United Nations Charter, intergovernmental treaties, international covenants to which Afghanistan is a party and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...¹².” According to Article 43 of this Constitution, “Education is the right of all Afghan citizens, and up to the bachelor’s level, it is provided free of charge by the government in public educational institutions. The state is obligated to design and implement effective programs to ensure the balanced expansion of education across Afghanistan, guarantee compulsory secondary education, and enable the teaching of native languages in regions where they are spoken¹³.” The Education Law of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, in adherence to the Constitution, also stipulated that “Afghan citizens have an equal right to education without any form of discrimination¹⁴.”

9 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law>

10 UNESCO, state obligations and responsibilities on regarding the right to education, 23 January 2024: <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/state-obligations-responsibilities?hub=70224>

11 UN UN Treaty Body Database, ratification status for Afghanistan: https://tbinetnet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=1&Lang=EN

12 The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Article 7, (4 January 2004)

13 Id.

14 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Education Law, Article 3, (24 July 2008).



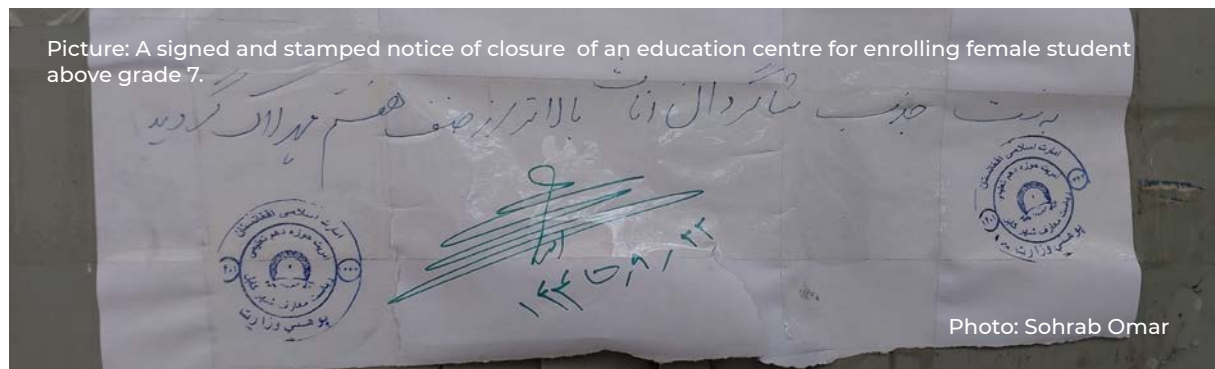
Under the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, despite significant challenges such as corruption and ongoing conflict, the government, non-government organizations and civil society made valuable efforts to ensure citizens' access to the right to education. Notable progress was particularly achieved in girls' access to education at various levels. According to a report by UNESCO, the number of female students increased twentyfold, from 5,000 in 2001 to 100,000 in 2021, and the literacy rate among women in the country doubled. Additionally, the number of girls in primary schools rose from nearly zero in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2018¹⁵.

Significant progress was also made in establishing public and private educational institutions. By 2020, a total of 17,060 public schools were active nationwide, including 7,423 primary schools, 4,223 middle schools, and 5,414 high schools, of which 1,971 were private (including 1,013 primary, 591 middle, and 376 high schools). The total number of teacher training centres during this period reached 354, and the number of adult literacy schools reached 65¹⁶. Moreover, out of the total 10,017,925 students in educational centres across the country, 3,816,793 were female students¹⁷.



Reports indicate significant success in increasing the number of female teachers as well. Prior to August 2021, out of 226,000 teachers in public schools, 81,000 (36%) were women. However, one year after the Taliban regained control over Afghanistan, by August 2022, they eliminated approximately 14,000 government jobs held by women, 82% of which were teaching positions¹⁸.

The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 stripped Afghan women of their constitutional rights as the Taliban abolished the previous constitution¹⁹, which guaranteed citizens access to human rights, including the right to education. Taliban reinstated the same policies that, from 1996 to 2001, had deprived women and girls of their right to education and other human rights²⁰.



Picture: A signed and stamped notice of closure of an education centre for enrolling female student above grade 7.

Photo: Sohrab Omar

15 UNESCO, "Let Women and Girls in Afghanistan Learn," (January 18, 2023); <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>

16 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, "Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Operational Plan and Achievements in Education," p. 21 (2021), see also: https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2021-01/MoE%20Annual%20Progress%20Report%201399%20%20National%20level%20Final_2_0.pdf

17 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, Directorate of Quality Assurance, "Analytical Statistical Book of Education," (2020), see also: https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2021-07/Analytical_Report_1398_Dari.pdf

18 Special Inspector General, Afghanistan Reconstruction, "The Status of Education in Afghanistan: Taliban Policies Have Resulted in Restricted Access to Education and a Decline in Quality" (October 2023), <https://www.sigarmil.com/pdf/evaluations/SIGAR-24-01-IP.pdf>

19 Rawadari, "Justice Denied: An Examination of the Legal and Judicial System in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan" (June 2023); <https://rawadari.org/040620231635.htm/>

20 Human Rights Watch, "Taliban's Attack on Girls' Education harming Afghanistan's future", (September 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/17/talibans-attack-girls-education-harming-afghanistans-future>



DEPRIVATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION WITH THE TALIBAN'S RETURN TO POWER

Since the Taliban regained control of the country on 15th August 2021, they have issued at least 70 decrees, orders, and statements imposing restrictions on women's lives, including their rights to work, move freely, access healthcare, and receive education²¹. Some of these decrees and announcements specifically aim to systematically and intentionally strip women and girls of their right to education²².



For example, on 17th September 2021, the Taliban's Ministry of Education refused to reopen girls' schools, later claiming they were "not against education" and would reopen the girls' schools²³. However, on the 23rd March 2022, the Taliban announced that girls' schools would remain closed until girls' attire met "cultural and Islamic standards²⁴."

On the 27th April 2022, the Taliban declared that, to "completely eliminate mixing" of male and female students in the universities in Kabul, three days of the week would be allocated to male students and three days to female students²⁵.

Following this, on 19th December 2022, the Taliban Ministry of Higher Education ordered all public and private universities to prohibit female students from entering classrooms until further notice.



In an official letter signed by Neda Muhammad Nadim, the Taliban's Minister of Higher Education, all universities were instructed to immediately implement this directive²⁶. Neda Muhammad Nadim later justified this decision by stating that female students were not adhering to the Islamic dress code, were attending classes without a male guardian, were studying in the same classroom as male students, and were traveling from one province to another without a mahram (male guardian)²⁷.

21 UN Women, "FAQs: Afghan Women three years after the Taliban takeover" (August 2024), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/faqs-afghan-women-three-years-after-the-taliban-takeover>

22 BBC Persian, "Schools Reopened in Afghanistan, but without Girls" (September 2021): <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-58608405>

23 Associated Press: "The AP Interview: Taliban Pledge all girls in Schools soon" (January 2022): <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-education-united-nations-kabul-taliban-c07aefcb90b560bc82b60b17d9623833>

24 Amnesty International: "Afghanistan: Taliban's backtrack on school re-opening for girls Irreversibly impacts their future" (March 22), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/afghanistan-talibans-backtrack-on-school-re-opening-for-girls-irreversibly-impacts-their-future/>

25 Bam Daily: Gender Segregation in Universities: People call Taliban's ministry of higher education the ministry of anti-education (27 April 2022): <https://8am.media/fa/gender-segregation-in-universities-people-call-the-taliban-ministry-of-higher-education-the-ministry-of-education/>

26 The Guardian: "Taliban ban Afghan women from university education" (December 2022): <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/20/taliban-ban-afghan-women-university-education>

27 DW: "Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education Defends Ban on women's education (December 2022)": <https://www.dw.com/fa-af/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B5%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B5%DB%8C%D9%84-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF/a-64194225>



This action by the Taliban triggered widespread reactions both in the region and globally. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW committee) condemned the Taliban's decision to ban the education of women and labelled it a blatant violation of customary and binding international obligations, including a breach of the provisions set out in the CEDAW²⁸. Protests also erupted within the country. Women protesters held peaceful demonstrations and gatherings in various parts of the country to voice their opposition to the Taliban's decision. Additionally, 60 university professors across Afghanistan collectively resigned²⁹. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also expressed deep disappointment with this Taliban decision, emphasizing that the people of Afghanistan, both women and men, must have access to their basic rights, including the right to education³⁰. However, the Taliban paid no heed to such reactions and continued to ignore their legal obligations regarding the right to education for women, persisting with even stricter restrictions.



For instance, on January 28, 2023, the Ministry of Higher Education issued an official letter to all public and private universities, banning women and girls from participating in the national university entrance exam (Kankor). The letter instructed all active universities across the country that, until further notice, women and girls were not allowed to participate in the Kankor exam³¹.

Taliban's restrictions on women and girls' education continue unabated. Following the restriction on girls' education beyond grade 6th, the Taliban's Ministry of Education has instructed schools not to allow tall girls into classrooms, even if they are below the sixth grade³². Additionally, in several provinces, including Kandahar and Uruzgan, the Taliban Ministry of Education has banned women and girls from studying in medical education centres, although in other parts of the country, girls are allowed to study in these centres provided they follow the rules set by the Department of PVPV³³. Additionally, the Taliban's Ministry of Education has implemented a policy separating male and female students in elementary schools and health education centres³⁴. Under this policy, male teachers are prohibited from teaching female students, and female teachers cannot teach male students.

28 UN Human Rights of the High Commissioner, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, "Afghanistan: Banning women and girls from school and workplace jeopardises entire country, UN committee condemns" (29 December 2022): [https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/12/afghanistan-banning-women-and-girls-schools-and-workplace-jeopardises-entire-country-text=GENEVA%20\(29%20December%202022\)%20%E2%80%93,the%20world%27s%20biggest%20gender%20gaps](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/12/afghanistan-banning-women-and-girls-schools-and-workplace-jeopardises-entire-country-text=GENEVA%20(29%20December%202022)%20%E2%80%93,the%20world%27s%20biggest%20gender%20gaps)

29 Afghanistan International, "Group Resignation of Over 60 University Professors in Afghanistan in Protest Against Gender Apartheid," (December 23, 2022): <https://www.iranintl.com/2022/12/23/38665>

30 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Concerns of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation over the Ban on Women's Education in Schools by the Interim Government," (March 24, 2022): https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=33958&t_ref=22699&lan=en

31 Rawadari: "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: Mid-year report 2023" (August 2023): <https://rawadari.org/120820231648.htm/>

32 Rawadari: "The Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report 2024" (August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>

33 Rawadari: "Afghanistan Human Rights Situation Report 2023" (March 2024) <https://rawadari.org/020320241765.htm/>

34 UNGA, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Clause (e), Article 10, (18 December 1979): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>



Out of a population of 12 million illiterate individuals over the age of 15 in Afghanistan, approximately 7.2 million are women³⁵. Despite this, the Taliban have also banned literacy and vocational training programs for women. This action is a clear violation of CEDAQ, which obligates states to swiftly reduce educational disparities between men and women. Over the past three years, the Taliban have systematically and deliberately eliminated all avenues and opportunities for women to access their right to education.

The Taliban's discriminatory policies on education have been met with persistent protests particularly from women activists in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban continue to violently suppress these protests.

ARREST, TORTURE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, AND MURDER OF WOMEN PROTESTERS

Amid escalating restrictions on fundamental freedoms for women and their systematic exclusion from public life, women, especially women's rights defenders inside Afghanistan, have organized peaceful protests and gatherings. Since the Taliban's return to power, women have organized demonstrations in Kabul and several other provinces against the Taliban's discriminatory policies, including the deliberate deprivation of girls' right to education, and demanded the lifting of restrictions on women's human rights and freedoms.



The Taliban have violently suppressed these protests and gatherings, arresting, torturing, and threatening the protesters³⁶. Some of these women were subjected to sexual assault in Taliban detention centres, and some were killed³⁷.

For instance, on 16 September 2021, eight women protesters involved in organizing demonstrations were mysteriously killed in Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh³⁸.

According to a joint report by The Guardian and Rukhshana Media, armed Taliban members recorded themselves assaulting a woman protester in prison and later sent her the video as a threat to prevent her from organizing further protests against the Taliban³⁹. The Taliban have resorted to

35 UNESCO: "UNESCO stands with all Afghans to ensure that youth and adults, in Afghanistan especially women and girls, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030." (20 April 2023): <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-stands-all-afghans-ensure-youth-and-adults-afghanistan-especially-women-and-girls-achieve>

36 UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situation for Afghanistan: "Situation of human rights in Afghanistan" (September 20, 2022): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc516-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

37 Rawadari: "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: Mid-year report 2023" (August 2023): <https://rawadari.org/120820231648.htm/>

38 RAWADARI: "Repression, Regressions and Reversals: One Year of Taliban Rule and Human Rights in Afghanistan " (December 2022): <https://rawadari.org/10122022196.htm/>

39 The Guardian: "Video appears to show gang-rape of Afghan women in Taliban jail" (3 July 2024): https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jul/03/video-appears-to-shows-gang-rape-of-woman-in-a-taliban-jail?utm_term=Autofeed&CMP=tw_t_gu&utm_medium&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1720002279



Photo: Sohrab Omar



extreme violence to suppress women's gatherings and any other forms of protest and criticism. In a video released on social media in May 2022, Neda Mohammad Nadim, the former Taliban governor of Kabul, stated: "Opposing the Taliban is forbidden and opponents of this regime are wajibul-qatl (punishable by death)."⁴⁰ On 25 December 2022, the Taliban governor in Kandahar labelled protesters as rebels and instructed all subordinate departments: "Those who undermine the government should be handed over to the law for trial according to Sharia."



Findings by Rawadari indicate that from August 2021 to July 2024, the Taliban detained and imprisoned at least 78 women protesters⁴¹. For example, on 11 February 2023, in Takhar province, the Taliban arrested a woman protester and her brother⁴². She was detained for objecting to the Taliban's discriminatory policies against women.

A man from Kandahar told Rawadari that after criticizing the Taliban's policies restricting women's education in a television interview, he was dismissed from his job and threatened with death. He added that the Taliban came to his house one night, intimidating him to not speak against them again. Similarly, an educational activist from the same province was detained for two months after posting on Facebook to protest the closure of schools and universities for women. During his detention, he suffered severe torture and mistreatment. Additionally, in the public university in Kunar, a university professor was fired from his position with no advance notice following a Facebook post from him criticizing the Taliban's ban on women and girls education.

THE IMPACT OF PVPV LAW ON EDUCATION

Following the PVPV law, female students in primary schools and medical institutes/centres are facing increased restrictions. Recently, the Taliban's Ministry of Education ordered all schools to enforce further restrictions on girls' school uniform.



According to this, girls below the sixth grade i.e children as young as 9 and 10 years old must also wear masks/face coverings, gloves, and "Sharia-compliant hijab."

In another example, in Herat, the Taliban has instructed all female students studying in primary schools and health institutes to wear long clothing, scarves, and masks/face coverings, and to attend classes without makeup. The women's department of MPVPV in this province is responsible for

40 RAWADARI: "Repression, Regressions and Reversals: One Year of Taliban Rule and Human Rights in Afghanistan " (December 2022): <https://rawadari.org/10122022196.htm/>

41 Rawadari "Third Anniversary of Taliban Rule in Afghanistan: Widespread and continued human rights violations" (14 August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/140820241853.htm/>

42 Rawadari: "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: Mid-year report 2023" (August 2023): <https://rawadari.org/120820231648.htm/>



overseeing female students' adherence to the dress code. In Kunduz, girls in grades 4–6 (girls who are 10–12 years old) are instructed to cover their faces and wear burqas [veil] or masks. Similarly, in Badakhshan, girls below the sixth grade and female students in health institutes are instructed to wear Niqabs.



The PVPV department in the provinces of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, has mandated that girls over the age of ten must wear Sharia-compliant hijab. Additionally, private educational centres in these provinces are forbidden from enrolling girls above ten years old.



Our findings indicate that in Ghor, girls as young as 11-year-old have been denied entry to classrooms for not wearing face coverings and dark gloves. In Ghazni, the Taliban plans to move the health institute's classrooms to separate buildings to ensure compliance with PVPV law and prevent male and female students from seeing any sight of each other on campus.

Moreover, in Helmand, the PVPV department has ordered several private schools to separate classrooms based on sex for grades 1 to 3. Classes for boys and girls in grades 3–6 were previously segregated in this province. In Kandahar, the PVPV department has also advised girls in grades five and six, who are over the age of ten, to come to school with a Mahram [male guardian], although this advice has not yet been implemented.

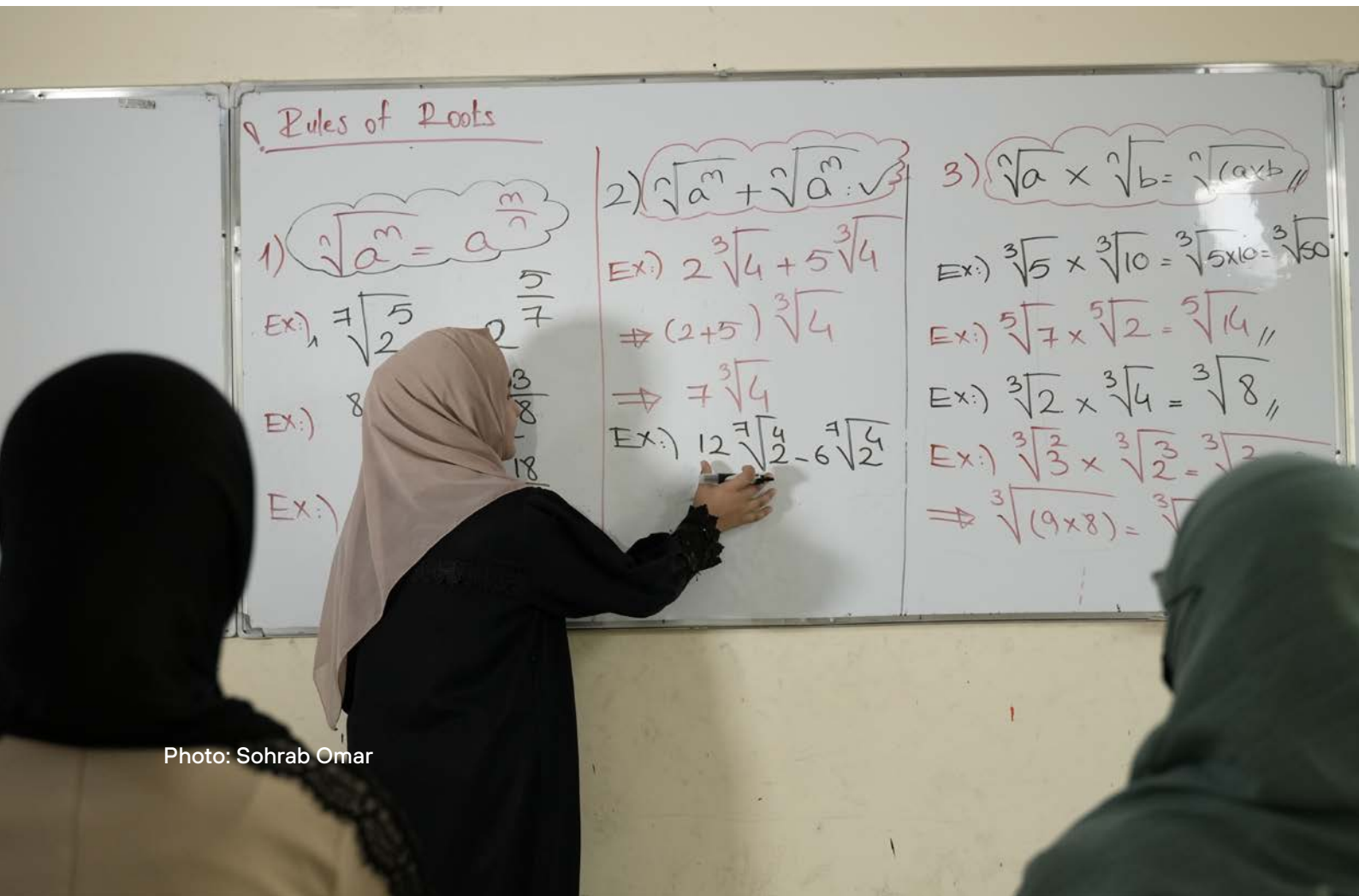


Photo: Sohrab Omar



CURRICULUM UNDER THE TALIBAN

The Taliban have not officially announced the abolishing of the Republic-era Education Law or the Higher Education Law, yet the findings from this report indicate that these laws are not being implemented. Instead, the educational institutions are receiving a mix of verbal and written instructions from the Taliban authorities. Currently, there is no clarity about a law governing the conduct of educational institutions, resulting in widespread disarray and chaos across schools and universities in the country.



Through both written and verbal instructions, In the past three years, the Taliban's Ministries of Education and Higher Education have made significant changes to school and university curricula. Core subjects such as math, literacy and social sciences receive less focus, while priority is given to some religious education and also topics introduced by the Taliban.

Furthermore, a considerable number of professional teaching staff and university faculty have left the country, leading to a decline in educational quality across institutions. The following sections provide a detailed account of these developments.

A- SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The de-facto Ministry of Education has removed several subjects from the school curriculum labelling them "non-essential subjects." These include life skills, civic education, and calligraphy in certain classes, patriotism, cultural studies, social sciences, arts, as well as subjects pertaining to Ja'fari jurisprudence in Shia-majority provinces.



These subjects have been replaced either by increased hours for religious studies or new religious subjects have been introduced. All religious subjects currently taught in schools, including newly introduced ones, adhere to Hanafi jurisprudence.

According to decision No. 4 from the 25th October 2023 leadership meeting of the Ministry of Education's and instructions from the Minister, all schools have been instructed to increase class hours dedicated to the Quran and Islamic studies. The decision states that "classes should be blessed by beginning with Quran and Islamic teachings, and at least one Islamic scholar proficient in Quranic recitation and one Quran reciter should be hired at every school." The duties of these two scholars are to assist teachers and students in learning religious topics.

Picture: Some of the school textbooks removed from the curriculum





The directive also specifies that “life skills”⁴³ subject is to be removed from the curriculum for grades 1–3, with those hours instead allocated to Quran studies. Calligraphy, previously a standalone subject, will now be integrated into another subject drawing, reducing its class time from four hours to two hours per week, with the remaining time shifted to Islamic studies. Similarly, calligraphy classes in grades 4–6 are consolidated, reducing instruction from four hours to two hours per week, with the freed-up hours dedicated to Quran studies and Islamic education.

Moreover, the curriculum for grades 7–9, which are currently only male students, will no longer include civic education⁴⁴ and drawing. Foreign language (usually English) instruction time is reduced and redirected toward Arabic language instruction. For grades 10–12, which are currently only male students, civic education and cultural studies have also been removed, with those hours now allocated to Islamic education and Quranic Tafseer [interpretation & explanation].

The Taliban’s Ministry of Education has described the main goal of curriculum changes in schools as “teaching the fundamentals of religion and strengthening students’ minds.” In their justification for removing subjects, they stated that the removed subjects “do not align with the country’s current conditions and today’s needs⁴⁵.”

Additionally, in Shia-populated provinces and regions, the Taliban’s Ministry of Education has removed all content related to Jafari jurisprudence from religious textbooks, replacing it with Hanafi jurisprudence.



The ministry has also introduced subjects such as “Emirate Studies,” “Taliban Studies,” “Propaganda Against ISIS,” “Jihad,” and “War with the Americans” into school curricula, while removing other topics like the national anthem, introduction to historical figures such as King Amanullah Khan, the celebration of Nowruz, the constitution, and illustrations of “animate beings” from some school textbooks.

43 Life Skills Curriculum for First Grade: Self-awareness, knowledge of God, patriotism, familiarity with school, manners of greeting, etiquette for asking about others, speaking manners, conduct in gatherings, eating and drinking manners, respect for parents, respect for elders, etc., please see: https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-02/G1-Dr-Life_Skill.pdf
Life Skills Curriculum for Second Grade: Children’s behaviour and roles within the family and society, problem-solving, organizing daily tasks, helping others and asking for help, peaceful living, friendship, empathy for others, compassion for animals, etc. https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-02/G2-Dr-Life_skill.pdf

Life Skills Curriculum for Third Grade: Self-confidence, decision-making, courage, good conduct, public property awareness, children’s rights, effective communication methods, helping those in need, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, reconciliation, etc.: https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-02/G3-Dr-Life_Skill.pdf

44 Civic Education Curriculum for Seventh Grade: Basic human needs, the need for family, how to build a successful family, social groups, etc: <https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-03/G7-Dr-Civic.pdf>

Civic Education Curriculum for Eighth Grade: The importance of education, ways to meet economic needs, the role of money in life, global economic relations, introduction to social service organizations and mass media: <https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-03/G8-Dr-Civic.pdf>

Civic Education Curriculum for Ninth Grade: The state and its responsibilities, introduction to Afghanistan’s constitution, understanding the political system and government, democracy, how people participate in governance, democracy in Afghanistan, the United Nations, and human rights for ninth-grade students.: <https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2020-03/G9-Dr-Civic.pdf>

45 The Taliban’s Ministry of Education, Changes in the curriculum plan for general education schools, Decree No. 4 (25 October 2023)



Similarly, content related to human rights, as well as the importance of women's political, civic, economic, social, and cultural participation, has been removed with the elimination of civic and cultural studies from school curricula.

B- UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

The Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education has also implemented significant changes in university curricula across the country over the past three years. Due to the Taliban's ban on women's university attendance, this curriculum is mainly taught to men. New subjects, including "Emirate Studies," "Tajweed of the Holy Quran (recitation)," "Religions and Religious Sects," "Islamic Economic System," "Islamic Political System," "Islamic Social and Family System," "Hanafi Jurisprudence," "Islamic Thought," "History of Islamic Thought," "Islamic Ethics," and "Prominent Islamic Figures," have been added as new and independent subjects in university programs.

The findings from Rawadari indicate that currently, the majority of university course units nationwide are dedicated to religious and Islamic subjects, specifically related to Hanafi jurisprudence. For instance, in the faculty departments where the subject of Islamic Culture was previously taught as six units over a four-year program, it has now increased to 24 units—quadrupling in hours. Similarly, according to the Taliban's latest decisions, faculties that previously taught Islamic Culture as eight units over eight semesters now offer it as 36 units, and it has become a mandatory subject. In faculties where this subject was previously offered as two units over a four-year program, it has now been increased six fold. An interviewee from Bamiyan stated that the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education has significantly increased the number of units for religious and supplementary subjects that are unrelated to students' academic fields, leading to less time and attention to core and specialized subjects.



It is worth noting that the changes in the number of hours for religious subjects vary from province to province. For example, a source from Kandahar University told Rawadari that in faculties where Islamic Culture was previously an eight-unit subject, it has now been increased to 24 units, and the Taliban also plans to either modify or remove contemporary history from curricula.

Previously, subjects like human rights, peace, and democracy were offered as optional courses in most universities and higher education institutes. However, the Taliban have now completely banned these subjects and replaced them with religious studies in the curriculum.



A respondent from Badakhshan stated that topics on human rights and other subjects related to citizenship, peace, democracy, and civic values have been removed from the curriculum of higher education institutes. Instead, the hours for subjects such as Islamic Culture, Jurisprudence and Law, Islamic History, Islamic Economic System, Islamic Political System, Islamic Social and Family System, and Pashto have been increased.



Another interviewee told Rawadari that the Taliban has also introduced an “Emirate Studies” course at universities, with one professor appointed at each university specifically for this subject.



Human rights had previously been a core subject in the faculties of Law and Political Science, but findings from this report indicate that the Taliban have removed it from the curriculum in the law faculties of both public and private universities in several provinces.

For example, although human rights are still listed on the class schedule for the Law Faculty in Herat, its teaching has been banned through an oral directive from the university president. Additionally, following orders from the same university president and the PVPV department, the human rights subject was dropped from curriculum in a private university in Herat as well.

The Dari (Farsi/Persian) Literature subject has also been removed from some faculties, and in others, its credits have been reduced from four to two. For instance, at the university in Ghor province, Dari Literature, previously taught across all faculties, has either been removed or reduced from four to two credits. Some credits from specialized courses have also been reduced in favour of adding more credits to the Islamic Culture course.



Furthermore, the Taliban’s Ministry of Higher Education has banned the teaching of Jafari jurisprudence at the Sharia Faculty of Bamiyan University⁴⁶, mandating the compulsory teaching of Hanafi jurisprudence in this and other Shia-majority provinces. Sources from Daikundi province told Rawadari that teaching Hanafi jurisprudence, Islamic Culture, Aqayed wa Seerat-un-Nabi [beliefs and life of the Prophet] is now compulsory in all educational institutions in the province. In Kunar province, the Taliban have removed content related to Salafis from university textbooks.

These changes are part of a broader effort reshape the curriculum of higher education and align the universities with the Taliban’s objectives, and further curriculum changes are reportedly planned.



In its latest directive, the Taliban’s Ministry of Higher Education has ordered all professors of Islamic Culture (Saqaafat) and Sharia faculties to oversee department and faculty curricula to prevent the teaching of “non-religious and unnecessary” topics and to incorporate necessary adjustments. Consequently, Sharia professors are expected to soon review all subjects from a religious perspective and recommend changes.



Along similar lines, the Ministry of Higher Education recently announced plans to review academic and educational curricula of natural sciences, including assessing subjects like mathematics, physics, biology and chemistry from a religious perspective⁴⁷.

INSPECTION OF LIBRARIES AND CONFISCATION OF BOOKS IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

According to this report, the Taliban have conducted multiple inspections of libraries in educational and academic institutions, seizing numerous books, especially those related to women's rights and human rights.



For instance, the Taliban's Ministry of Education collected 110 publications, including books, magazines, and monthly periodicals, under the label of "undesirable publications" from the library of Amir Ali Shir Nawai High School for Girls in Herat. These materials primarily included publications from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, books on women's rights, the constitution, democracy, and information on Jafari Jurisprudence. In Badghis, the Taliban also gathered all books written about women. In Kandahar, the Department of Information and Culture has received a list of books that should be removed from libraries and bookstores.

On 21 December 2023, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education announced that private university libraries would be inspected and that books conflicting with Hanafi jurisprudence or any books considered inappropriate would be confiscated⁴⁸. Subsequently, on 6 June 2024, the Taliban's Department of Education in Bamiyan instructed all schools in the province to remove the books about Jafari jurisprudence until new books were printed⁴⁹. In Ghazni, the Taliban's Department of Education removed religious materials and books related to Jafari jurisprudence from school libraries in Jaghatu district. A committee has been formed including representatives from the PVPV department, GDI (intelligence) representatives, and staff of the Information and Culture department. This committee is assigned to collect Shia-related books from all libraries, bookstores, and public libraries in all districts in Ghazni.

47 Radio Azadi, "Taliban: We will review the curriculum of science subjects including mathematics and chemistry from a religious perspective." (3 September 2024): <https://da.azadiradio.com/a/33104197.html>.

The news outlets Etilaatroz and Hasht-e-Subh, which operate in exile, have also published reports on changes to the educational curriculum. See their coverage: <https://8am.media/fa/details-of-the-talibans-curriculum-hatred-and-bloodshed-return-to-books/> and <https://www.etilaatroz.com/161946/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86/>

48 UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights: "Situation of human rights in Afghanistan" (29 February 2024): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5580-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>.

49 Rawadari: "The Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report 2024" (August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>

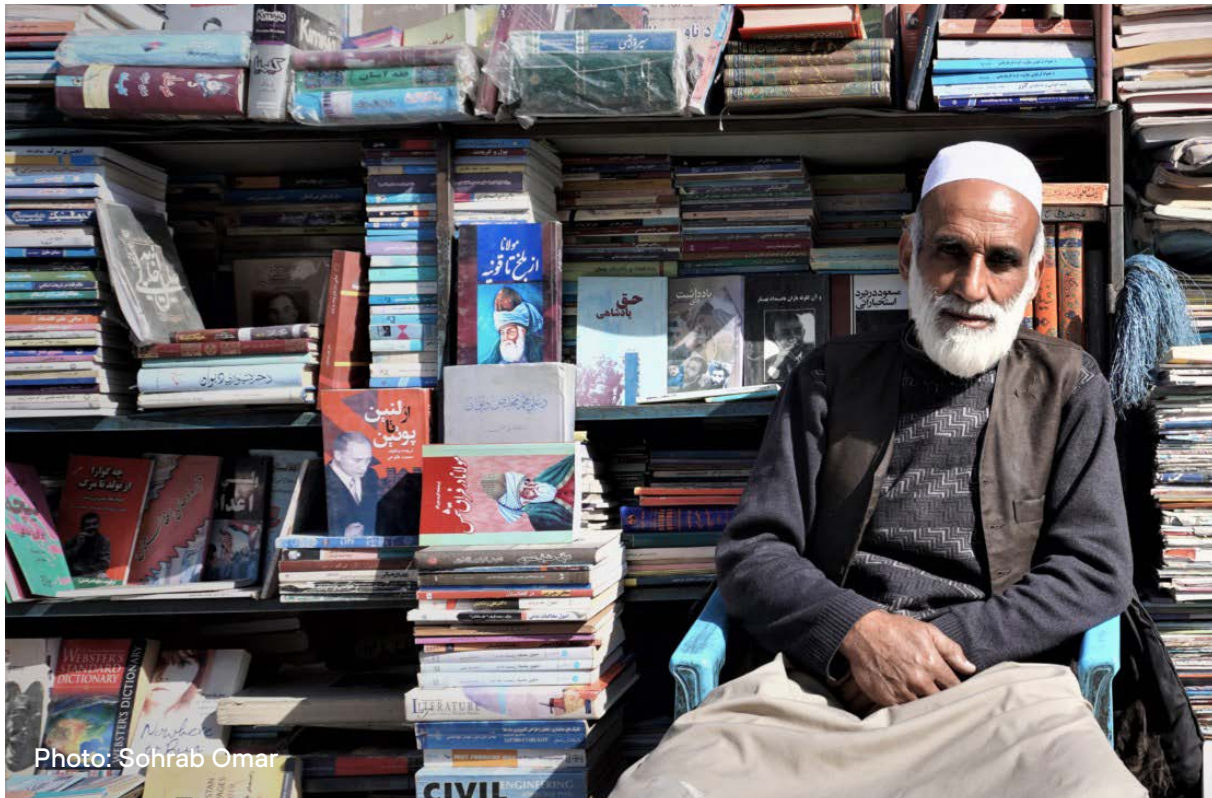


Photo: Sohrab Omar

In the past three years, the Taliban have banned the publication, sale, and distribution of books related to Shia beliefs, books printed in Iran, particularly those on religious reform, books on the history of Afghanistan's ethnic groups and nationalities, books about Jihadi leaders and groups opposing the Taliban, books against the Taliban and about ISIS, and books and articles on Salafism. They have already confiscated some of these materials⁵⁰. Recently, the Taliban issued a list to bookstores in Kabul prohibiting the distribution and sale of 400 titles. These banned books cover topics on Shia beliefs, modern governance, sociology, democracy, and political and civic freedoms and other similar topics⁵¹.

DECLINE IN QUALITY OF EDUCATION DUE TO NEW RECRUITMENTS

Over the past three years, a significant number of teachers and professors have either left their positions or have been dismissed. According to a report by BBC Persian, within 20 months of the Taliban's return to power, more than 400 out of 780 university professors at Kabul University alone had left the country⁵².

50 Rawadari: "Intimidation, Repression and Censorship: The Status of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression in Afghanistan" (May 2024): <https://rawadari.org/010520241785.htm/>

51 AMU Television: "Taliban banned sale of 400 books" (26 October 2024): <https://amu.tv/fa/133214/>

52 BBC Persian: "More than half of university professors have left Afghanistan" (22 May 2023): <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c9e385j5707o>



Additionally, since their return to power, the Taliban have dismissed a large number of teachers and professors from schools and universities across the country, replacing them with unqualified individuals, primarily graduates from religious madrassas. These new recruits were not selected through open competition but were appointed mainly by order of the Ministries of Higher Education and Education, with the approval of the GDI, despite lacking relevant knowledge or expertise.



For instance, in the southwest region, the Taliban recruit those individuals for schools and universities who have a history of Taliban membership. All recruits require prior approval from the GDI. In the provinces of Farah and Nimruz, the requirement for hiring new teachers is that they must follow the Hanafi Jurisprudence and must be recommended by a Taliban member.

In Badakhshan province, most individuals appointed as teachers in schools and universities lack university education and are graduates of Pakistani religious madrassas. Meanwhile, interviewees from Bamiyan report that all teachers hired by the Taliban in educational institutions merely have religious education and lack other professional knowledge and experience. Many of these individuals are recruited to teach core and specialized subjects, which has contributed to a decline in the quality of education in schools and universities. The Taliban have organized national exams to validate the educational credentials of madrassa graduates, aiming to qualify them for employment in government offices and educational institutions through this largely ceremonial exam process.

In Khost, Paktia, and Paktika provinces, the Taliban have replaced experienced and qualified female teachers with male madrassa graduates who lack both higher education and the necessary qualifications. Additionally, many former teachers and administrators in schools and universities in this region have been removed and replaced with unqualified individuals.

Furthermore, the Taliban have shown preferential bias on the basis of ethnic and religious affiliations of teachers and lecturers. For example, in Baghlan, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education has dismissed some Tajik and Uzbek professors, replacing them with Pashtun individuals. In another province, the Taliban's Ministry of Education removed four Shia teachers from a school, replacing them with their own members. Currently, two Shia teachers remain at this school but are under pressure from Taliban education officials to leave.



Similarly, in Kunduz and Takhar provinces, most of the teachers appointed by the Taliban have not undergone any exams prior to recruitment and are relatives of local Taliban officials, educated in Pakistani madrassas, and are unfamiliar with the local languages, Dari and Uzbek.

In Daikundi, Ghazni, and Ghor provinces, the Taliban have appointed teachers to schools and universities who also do not speak the local language, leading to communication challenges between students and the newly appointed teachers, as reported by interviewees from these provinces.



Among the newly appointed teachers by the Taliban, not a single woman is present. Moreover, on 3rd June 2024, the Taliban leader issued an order setting the monthly salary for all female employees at 5,000 Afghani (equivalent to \$73 USD). Following this decree, female employees in some provinces received this amount, while in other provinces, including Kandahar, their salaries were suspended due to ambiguity in the decree⁵³. On 7 July 2024, the Taliban's Ministry of Finance issued an official letter clarifying that this decree applies to female civil servants who do not report to workplace daily or fail to fulfil their duties according to their job descriptions⁵⁴. This would cover a significant number of female employees as women employees from all sectors but health and education (that too in limited numbers) do not report to work due to the Taliban ban. Additionally, information from Ghor province indicates that female teachers who work less than 24 hours per week are also being paid the minimum 5,000 Afghani salary. Notably, this restriction does not apply to male teachers who teach the same number of hours. The women teachers who continue to work face a variety of discrimination and abuse.



The Taliban dismiss and penalize women teachers on arbitrary and false charges. For example, in Bamiyan province, the Taliban dismissed a female teacher for allegedly violating hijab regulations. In another instance, in August 2024, a female teacher in Ghor province who had been encouraging girls not to attend religious madrassas was arrested by the Taliban and sentenced to two years in prison and 39 lashes. The Taliban accused her of “improper hijab and adultery.”

Since the Taliban's return to power, the quality of education in schools and academic institutions has declined sharply, and there is a growing trend of children dropping out of school to enrol in religious madrassas. This shift is partly due to the Taliban's lack of interest in core school subjects and their encouragement of families to send their children to religious institutions instead.

TALIBAN'S MONITORING OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Under the Republic, there was a practice of monitoring schools and universities by the delegations of Ministry of Education and Higher Education for quality assurance purposes. The Taliban lack a consistent method for monitoring schools and universities and their approach varies from one province to another and from one educational institution to another. For example, in several provinces like Kabul, Logar, Ghazni, Bamiyan, and Maidan Wardak, the Taliban have removed the “Education Monitoring” Unit from the structure of provincial education departments, transferring monitoring duties to the “Professional Development” section within these departments. However, in some

53 Rawadari: “The Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report 2024” (August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>

54 UNAMA: “the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan from April to June 2024”: <https://unama.unmissions.org/human-rights-situation-afghanistan-april-june-2024-update-english>



provinces, especially in the southwest region, the previous method of regular monitoring by a designated department remains in place.

The Taliban's main objectives in monitoring educational institutions, even in provinces that follow the previous oversight methods, are to assess female students' dress code, ensure compliance with the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice regulations, and encourage students to focus on religious studies. The PVPV Department plays the leading role in overseeing schools and universities. During their inspection of schools and universities, the Taliban primarily pursue the following two goals:

A- CONDUCTING RELIGIOUS AND "EMIRATE STUDIES" EXAMS

Taliban monitoring teams, mostly composed of employees from the GDI, MPVPV and Ministry of Information and Culture, assess the religious knowledge of students, teachers, and professors regarding the Taliban and Hanafi jurisprudence by administering religious and "Emirate Studies" exams. A teacher from Helmand province told Rawadari that the Taliban's inspection teams alter anything that does not align with their ideology and regularly give religious and ideological recommendations to students and teachers.



The de-facto Departments of Education, Information and Culture, and Intelligence regularly conduct "Emirate Studies" exams across schools and universities in Afghanistan. These exams consist of 50 questions in some provinces and up to 250 questions in others, most of which are prepared by the Intelligence Department. All students, teachers, and professors are required to take the exam.

The majority of questions focus on the establishment and achievements of the "Islamic Emirate," the life of Mullah Omar, the fight against American and other international forces, among other topics. Examples of these questions include: "In which year was Mullah Mohammad Omar born into a religious family," "Which five-year period was the phase of mobilization and secret jihad activities," "What type of corruption was the puppet government in Kabul involved in during the occupation," "How did the Islamic Emirate defeat NATO forces," and "Which year was the bloodiest and most challenging year for the Americans in the twenty-year jihad?"

Interviewees from Ghor province reported that each time the MPVPV staff inspect schools; they encourage both male and female students to engage in "jihad against infidels and immoralities" and assign them religious homework, which is evaluated during the next inspection. Another interviewee from Ghazni province mentioned that the Taliban regularly hold religious and ideological sessions for the university's administrative staff.

B- MONITORING THE STUDENT DRESS CODE

The Taliban monitor schools and universities primarily to enforce the PVPV law and dress code regulations for students, rather than to assess educational quality or address the concerns and needs of students. As one interviewee from Ghazni province mentioned, officials from the PVPV inspect



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د زرغونی
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د و القار و ایظون

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Photo: Sohrab Omar



educational institutions two to three times a week, introducing increasingly strict regulations each time for students, teachers, and professors to follow.



Interviewees from Kunduz province told Rawadari that the Taliban impose strict dress code requirements for female students in health science institutes and continuously monitor compliance. Female students are required to wear the “Burqa [veil]” (covering their entire body), and those who do not comply are not permitted to study in these institutions. Several female students in this province have been expelled from health sciences institutes for what the Taliban claim as violations of hijab and Islamic dress code regulations.

The Taliban inspection teams require male students and teachers to ensure that both their “appearance and character” conform to the standards set by the PVPV. In this regard, two teachers from Ghazni and Logar provinces reported being threatened to be dismissed by the Taliban inspectors for not wearing hats and having long beards. Furthermore, all male students and teachers are required to wear white hats.

DISREGARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

Teaching human rights in schools and universities helps foster an environment of respect for human rights and promotes tolerance and respect for diverse beliefs. Therefore, the education system should provide opportunities to enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of children in line with human rights values. Article 29, Paragraph 1(b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “All State Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to understanding human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.” Similarly, Paragraph 1(d) of the same article states that education should prepare the child for a “responsible life in a free society, in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national, and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin⁵⁵.”

As previously discussed, the Taliban have removed topics related to human rights, civil rights, peace, democracy, and women’s rights from the curriculum in some educational institutions, and instead there is a prevalence of a language of exclusion and discrimination that is promoted by the Taliban in the educational institutions.

55 UNGA, International Convention on the Rights of the Child, (29 November 1989): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>



A- PROMOTING GENDER INEQUALITY AND HATRED AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

CEDAW mandates that member states take necessary measures to eliminate stereotyped concepts and clichés regarding the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education⁵⁶. This includes promoting coeducation and revising school texts and programs to eliminate such stereotypes. However, the findings of this report reveal that the Taliban have integrated gender stereotypes, discrimination and hatred against women into the educational policies and systems. For instance, in Badakhshan province, students are taught in classrooms that “Women leaving the home are, according to religious texts, un-Islamic and immoral, and if women claim equal rights with men, it leads society toward corruption and decay.” Educators in this province also teach that “Men have twice the rights of women. Demanding equal rights for women is the work of the enemies of Islam. The Qur’an affirms men’s authority and superiority over women, and if women hold decision-making roles in families and society, it will lead to moral decay and societal corruption.”

According to interviewees, highly derogatory views about women are also being promoted in classrooms at the university in Baghlan province. For instance, it is stated that “if a woman does not obey a man’s command, she should be beaten. Since women are ‘deficient in intellect’ and cannot complete tasks correctly, they should consult with their husbands or male family members on all matters.” It is also taught that “a man owns his wife, and women are created for men; therefore, men have the right to treat women however they please, and women have no right to complain, nor should others interfere, as this concerns only the ‘owner.’” Religious teachers tell male students that “if they can take a second, third, or fourth wife, it will increase their respect.”



In Nimruz province, a respondent reported that religious studies teachers tell students that “if women go to the mosque, it becomes defiled, and prayers should not be performed there.” Similarly, in Badakhshan, the Taliban have repeatedly stated in public Friday sermons that women and girls are “agents of Satan and sources of corruption and immorality that lead men astray⁵⁷.”

These statements represent discriminatory and degrading views towards women, further promoting discrimination, violence, and inequality in society, with harmful impact on the upbringing and perspectives of children and youth in the country. Thus, the Taliban’s organized effort to institutionalize religious extremism and gender-based discrimination through the educational system is alarming and dangerous, as it exposes women to increased discrimination and violence, while further restricting their rights.

Article 13, paragraph 2 of the PVPV law states “it is necessary for women to cover their faces to

56 UNGA, International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, Paragraph C, Article 10, (18 December 1979): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

57 Rawadari. “The Human Rights Situation of Children in Afghanistan: Violations of civil and political rights” 18 November 2023: <https://rawadari.org/181120231707.htm/>



prevent temptation.’’ Additionally, Paragraph 3 of this article declares that “a woman’s voice (in the form of singing, reciting hymns, or readings in public) is Awrah [private]⁵⁸.’’ This law, which reflects the Taliban’s extreme ideological view of women and their role in society, serves as a tool for undermining women’s dignity and legitimizing gender discrimination within society. As outlined in earlier sections of the report, girls below sixth grade are also required to observe a strict dress code, including mandatory coverings such as masks or Burqas [veil], gloves, and long clothing so that their bodies and faces are not visible. Additionally, findings indicate that elementary school girls are now prohibited from singing or reciting poetry during morning assemblies at school.

Moreover, in public and private universities and higher education institutions, the Taliban have prohibited faculty from teaching topics related to women’s rights and gender equality. For instance, in a consultative meeting with university faculty in Ghor province, the Taliban governor and the university president instructed educators to refrain from discussing or teaching women’s rights, especially topics related to gender equality. Any such subjects in the curriculum should not be taught. The Taliban have also removed images of women from college and university campuses.

B- RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS FROM ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS, AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

According to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, “In countries where there are ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, or persons of indigenous origin, a child belonging to such a minority or indigenous community shall not be denied the right to enjoy their culture, practice their religion, or use their language alongside other members of their group⁵⁹.’’ Article 14 of the same convention grants all children freedom of religion and belief⁶⁰. Furthermore, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities asserts that individuals belonging to such groups have the right to freely enjoy their culture, express their religion publicly, and use their language without discrimination or interference, in both personal and social contexts⁶¹.

Article 5 of the Convention against Discrimination in Education emphasizes the recognition of national minority members’ rights to educational activities, including establishing schools and, according to the educational policies of each member state, teaching or using their language in these schools.

1- Right to Education in One’s Native Language

Education in one’s native language is essential to ensure its long-term survival. For this reason, this right is protected in numerous international human rights documents. Article 4, Paragraph 4 of the

58 Ministry of Justice of Taliban, the law on Propagation of Virtue (31 July 2024)

59 UNGA, International Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30, (20 November 1989): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

60 The very same Article 14

61 UNGA, Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Paragraph 1, Article 2(18 December 1992): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic#:~:text=States%20shall%20protect%20the%20existence.measures%20to%20achieve%20those%20ends.>



Declaration on the Rights of National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities states: “States shall, where possible, take appropriate measures to enable persons belonging to minorities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue and to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language, and culture of the minorities existing within their territory⁶².” Similarly, UNESCO’s Charter on Mother Language Education mandates that “all school students should start their formal education in their mother tongue. All governments are obliged to create and distribute all necessary resources, materials, and tools to strengthen and teach the mother tongue⁶³.”

Findings from this report indicate that after the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, while most children can still receive education in their native language, this right has been restricted for children from ethnic and linguistic minorities in certain provinces. For example, in Badakhshan province during the Republic era, in addition to Dari (Farsi/Persian), elementary and middle school courses in areas populated by ethnic and linguistic minorities were also taught in the students’ native languages. Textbooks were available in Uzbek, Balochi, and Pamiri languages. However, since the Taliban’s return to power, education in these native languages has been halted, and students are now only taught in Dari. In Pamiri-dominated districts, the Taliban have ceased native-language education.



Similarly, in Uzbek- and Turkmen-majority areas in Kunduz and Takhar provinces, the Taliban were planning to ban education in Uzbek and there was a verbal order to stop teaching Uzbek books, however, the local community and some teachers objected to this order. Subsequently education in Uzbek has continued in schools that are run by Uzbek-speaking principals and teachers.

2- Right to Education in Religion, Culture and History

The previous Afghan constitution specified that “the government should develop religious curricula for schools based on the Islamic sects present in Afghanistan⁶⁴.” Article 4, Paragraph 4 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities also states: “Governments, where appropriate, should provide education to encourage awareness of the history, traditions, language, and culture of minorities residing within their territory⁶⁵.”

However, since the Taliban’s returned to power, they have removed Ja’afri jurisprudence from the educational system, restricting religious education solely to Hanafi jurisprudence. For instance, the de facto authorities prohibited the teaching of Jafari jurisprudence at Bamiyan University, the only university serving a predominantly Shia population⁶⁶.

62 Id, paragraph 4, Article 4

63 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Justice, the Constitution, (4 January 2024)

64 Id. Article 45

65 UNGA, Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities, (18 December 1992): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic#:~:text=States%20shall%20protect%20the%20existence,measures%20to%20achieve%20those%20ends>

66 Amnesty International, “Afghanistan 2023”: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/afghanistan/report-afghanistan/>



In a speech, Neda Mohammad Nadim, the acting Taliban Minister of Higher Education denied the existence of other Islamic sects in Afghanistan, stating that everyone in the country follows Hanafi jurisprudence⁶⁷.

Rawadari's findings indicate that in Shia-populated districts of Ghazni province, the teaching of Jafari jurisprudence has been banned in schools, and students are required to study Hanafi jurisprudence instead. Sources in Ghor report that, per the Taliban leader's directive, no educational institution is permitted to teach books on Jafari jurisprudence. Although Shia religious madrassas are still operating in these provinces, allowing Shia children to learn about their faith if desired. However, the Taliban have banned non-Hanafi religious education centres in Badakhshan.

The Taliban local authorities have held book reading competitions with themes of Hanafi jurisprudence and "Emirate Studies" in schools and universities in Bamiyan to encourage Shia children to adopt Hanafi teachings and promote the Taliban's worldview.

Additionally, the MPVPV has established religious schools in seven districts of Badakhshan for followers of Ismaili sect, where the children are forced to learn Hanafi jurisprudence. Ismaili families have been pressured to send their children to these schools⁶⁸.

C- ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

International human rights documents guarantee the right to education for all individuals without exception. The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obligates member states to recognize the right to education for persons with disabilities without discrimination, based on equal opportunity. The Convention also mandates states to ensure that these individuals have access to free, quality, compulsory primary or secondary education and to provide supportive measures tailored to individual needs, such as Braille and alternative learning methods⁶⁹.

Since the Taliban have restricted the right to education for Afghan women and girls based on gender, girls with disabilities across Afghanistan are also deprived of educational opportunities. Our findings indicate that the Taliban have closed various educational and vocational centres for children with disabilities throughout the country. Currently, only a few centres allow blind and deaf girls to continue their education under the condition that they are younger than 14 years old,

In the past, blind and deaf children attended specialized educational centres in Logar, Ghazni, Kunduz, Takhar, and Kabul, which the Taliban have gradually shut down over the past three years. Sources report that currently, the Taliban's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour have allocated no budget to support educational and vocational centres for individuals with disabilities.

67 Kabul Now: "In an Effort to Create a Monolithic Sunni Afghanistan, the Taliban Remove Shia Textbooks from Bamiyan school, (7 June 2024) <https://kabulnow.com/2024/06/35960/#:~:text=Very%20early%20on%20after%20their%20resumption%20of,the%20one%20university%20in%20a%20Shia%20majority%20province>

68 Rawadari: "The Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report 2024" (August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>

69 UNGA, International Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities, (12 December 2006): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>



In Khost province, one literacy and vocational training centre for blind and deaf children remains operational; however, girls are not permitted to attend. In Ghor, blind and deaf girls may attend a specialized educational centre for children with disabilities, provided they are under the age of 14.

The impact of exclusion from education is even greater for girls with disabilities, as specialized schools typically provide a safe social space where they also learn essential life skills and learn to live with more independence.



AP Photo Felipe Dana

VIOLENCE, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS AND MADRASSAS

Findings from this report indicate that after the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, and in the absence of any laws prohibiting crimes against children, various forms of violence—including physical punishment and sexual harassment—have increased in schools and religious learning institutions.

A- VIOLENCE AND PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

Since the Taliban has employed individuals in schools and educational centres who are predominantly graduates of religious seminaries and lack familiarity with proper educational and disciplinary methods, they often resort to punishing and abusing children⁷⁰. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights also expressed concern in his latest report about the rise in corporal punishment of students due to the hiring of “unqualified” or “under qualified” teachers in schools⁷¹.

70 Rawadari. “The Human Rights Situation of Children in Afghanistan: Violations of civil and political rights” 18 November 2023: <https://rawadari.org/181120231707.htm/>

71 Special Rapporteur on Human Rights “the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan”, (30 August 2024): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/a79330-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-afghanistan>



The findings of Rawadari reveal the following practices of student punishment in schools, mostly carried out by newly appointed teachers and officials of the MPVPV: Beatings, cutting female students' nails to the point of causing pain and injury, striking with sticks or rulers, kicking, slapping and punching, cutting female students' headscarves with scissors, whipping, forcing students to hold pens between their fingers as punishment, forcing students to stand on one leg, placing shoes in children's mouths, choking, assigning a day of forced labour, expelling students from school and humiliation and verbal abuse.

A student from Bamiyan province told Rawadari that she had been repeatedly punished, humiliated, and insulted by officials from the PVPV due to her attire. In another instance in Badghis province, on 5 October 2024, a group of male and female students had organized a small celebration for Teachers' Day. The Taliban's monitoring delegation violently suppressed the event, and the students involved were expelled from school. Furthermore, according to this report, the staff of PVPV in the province excessively trim female students' nails, causing pain and injuries, and cut the headscarves of girls if they are wearing colourful scarves.

In July 2023, a student in a Kandahar school was beaten so severely by the school principal that he required hospitalization⁷². Similarly, a resident of Badakhshan province reported that a religious teacher punched his daughter in the head, causing her to fall while walking. She is now receiving treatment at a medical centre.

B- SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Rawadari has obtained reports indicating that women teachers and girls in schools and madrassas are subjected to sexual harassment. According to this information, only a small portion of sexual assault incidents against children in schools is revealed. Due to lack of safe spaces, the child victims lack the space and opportunity to speak about their experiences. Additionally, families out of fear of the Taliban and to protect their social reputation, tend to keep such cases hidden⁷³.



Our findings indicate that in a religious madrassa in Ghor, 6 female students were raped, however, the media did not cover the rapes due to the pressure and intimidation from the Taliban. One of the survivors married a few days after the rape and the families of three other survivors left the province. This madrassa had 250 female students and now almost all the students have left. Interviewees told us that following this horrific incident, many families have prevented their daughters from attending madrassas.

72 Rawadari. "The Human Rights Situation of Children in Afghanistan: Violations of civil and political rights" 18 November 2023: <https://rawadari.org/181120231707.htm/>

73 Ibid.



On 2nd September 2023, a Taliban member named Shah Wali, accompanied by two associates, entered a school in the Ghondak area of Bamiyan province intending to sexually assault a woman teacher. The teacher managed to escape and sought refuge in the house of a local elder⁷⁴.

In another incident in Daikundi province, a Quran reciter employed by the Taliban in a school pressured a female teacher to marry him. As a result, the teacher was forced to resign and relocate to another province.

SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF DENYING WOMEN ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Since their return to power, the Taliban have issued numerous decrees, orders, and regulations banning women from working in national and international governmental and non-governmental institutions, embassies, media, and sports, arts and culture sectors. Currently, women teachers in elementary schools and health workers, primarily in provincial centres, are the only women allowed to work, provided they observe strict hijab rules and have a male guardian (mahram) accompanying them⁷⁵.

The deprivation of women's rights to education and work has imposed severe social, psychological, and economic consequences on families and society. According to estimates by UNICEF, the exclusion of girls from education in the first 12 months of Taliban rule has cost Afghanistan's economy approximately \$500 million USD⁷⁶.

The rise in various forms of violence against women is another outcome of the denial of education, further worsening living conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan.

A- THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS AND RISE IN SUICIDES AMONG WOMEN AND GIRLS

Information gathered from conversations with victims, mental health departments of hospitals and counselling clinics in Afghanistan indicate that the intensification of restrictions on the lives of women and girls including the denial of the right to education and employment has led to severe mental health consequences for women and girls.

74 Silk Route, "The Taliban's attempt to sexually assault a female teacher in Bamiyan province: five civilians were injured", (2 September 2023) <https://jade-abresham.com/reports/11441/>

75 Rawadari: "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: Mid-year report 2023" (August 2023): <https://rawadari.org/120820231648.htm/>

76 United Nations Children's Fund, "Depriving girls of secondary education translates a loss of at least 500 million dollars for Afghan economy in last 12 months", (15 August 2022) <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/press-releases/depriving-girls-secondary-education-translates-loss-least-us500-million-afghan#:~:text=KABUL%2C%2015%20August%202022%20%E2%80%93%20Keeping%20girls%20out,GDP%2C%20according%20to%20a%20new%20analysis%20by%20UNICEF>



According to interviewees, despair, fear, anxiety, isolation, depression, suicidal thoughts, and behaviours such as screaming or crying out during sleep have increased among women and girls⁷⁷. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan has also expressed concern over the rising rates of suicide among young girls, particularly in the southern regions of the country, noting that 50% of all reported suicides occur among young girls.

On 11 August 2024, a schoolgirl ended her life with a gunshot. Sources stated that the cause was psychological distress and domestic violence.



In another case in Daikundi province, a female teacher attempted suicide after being dismissed by the Taliban's Department of Education on allegations of not adhering to their strict hijab rules. On 5 August 2024, a girl in the Khash district of Badakhshan died by suicide after being forced into marriage with a Taliban member. Similarly, on 25 September 2024, another girl in Badakhshan ended her life by ingesting poison due to the same reason—forced marriage with a Taliban member.

These cases stem from factors such as the ban on girls education, economic challenges, and the growing prevalence of domestic violence.

A mental health specialist in Kandahar told Rawadari that on average, ten individuals with mental health issues visit them daily, among whom at least three are women and girls deprived of education or employment. Another interviewee from Kandahar shared: "My daughter was in 11th grade when the Taliban closed schools and universities. She had planned to study medicine, but now she is struggling with mental health issues. She has nightmares and screams in her sleep. My daughter is undergoing treatment now, and the entire family is suffering alongside her."

Findings from this report also indicate increased fear, anxiety, and hopelessness about the future among girls below the sixth grade. A sixth-grade student from Bamiyan said: "Even thinking about not being able to study next year is deeply distressing."

B- FORCED AND EARLY MARRIAGES

There is a reported increase in forced and early marriages due to poverty as well as the bans on women's education and employment.

A female medical student at a private university told Rawadari that after the Taliban banned women's education, she was forced into marriage. She explained that after girls were prohibited from attending universities, her family pressured her into getting married. Similarly, a female student from Maidan-Wardak province said she was forced to marry a 40-year-old man at the age of 15. She had dreamed of becoming a teacher, but after schools and universities were closed to women, she lost all hope and now takes care of her child.

77 Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, "the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan", (29 February 2024) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5580-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

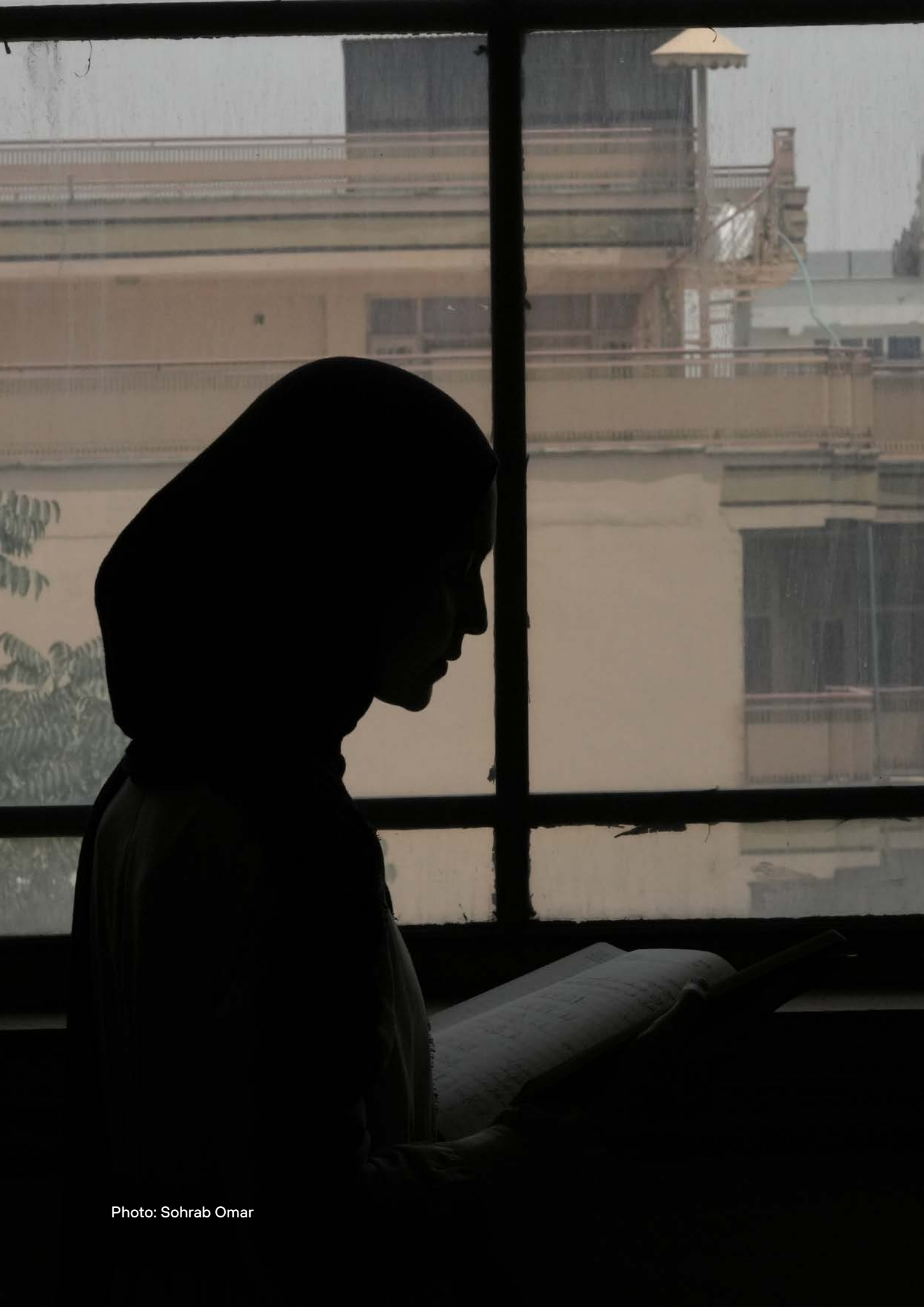


Photo: Sohrab Omar



Another interviewee from Kabul said: “I was in 8th grade when the Taliban banned girls from going to school. After a while, my family pressured me to get engaged. I was not willing, but they argued that there was no education or work left for me. They insisted I get engaged and married. Despite my efforts to resist, my family wouldn’t agree. I had no other choice because we were also in dire financial situation.”

The relative of a young woman from Badakhshan province shared her story: “Gul Pikai (pseudonym) was in 7th grade when the Taliban came and deprived her of education. Since her father’s financial situation was bad and her mother was sick, with no other breadwinner in the family, she was forced to marry a Taliban member who is 35 years old. Her husband already has another wife’”

A 10th-grade student from the capital of Ghazni province was compelled to enter an early and forced marriage last year (2023). The daughter of a street vendor, she had hoped to study medicine. However, being denied the right to education caused her severe distress and mental health issues. Succumbing to her father’s insistence and in an effort to escape her depression, she agreed to the marriage.

A 14-year-old girl from Herat province told Rawadari: “When the Taliban arrived, I was in 4th grade. My father smuggled our family out of the country, but in December 2023, we returned to Herat. A month later, my father forced me to marry a 40-year-old man due to our poor financial situation. My husband was wealthy but involved in smuggling and is now in prison for drug trafficking.’”

Another girl from Ghor province recounted: “Seven months ago, my parents insisted I get married. My father said that if I didn’t, the Taliban would force me to marry one of their members. I had no choice but to agree to their wishes.’” She added: “Before the Taliban came, I used to attend school and was the top student in my class. My mother always prayed for me to become a doctor in the future, and I had the same dream. But when the Taliban closed schools, all my hopes were crushed. I used to study day and night for my dreams, but now, my days and nights are filled with sadness, pain, and despair.’”

ALTERNATIVES TO FORMAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

The only effective and inclusive solution to ensure girls and women’s access to education is to guarantee this fundamental right and reopen schools and universities. No alternative approach can fully replace formal education, as the necessary resources for such alternatives are lacking, and, as the findings of this report indicate, the Taliban—particularly the GDI and MPVPV—are actively working to eliminate all opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan to pursue education.



A- UNDERGROUND AND VIRTUAL EDUCATION

Online and remote education could serve as a temporary alternative for girls who have been deprived of their right to education, provided that national and international non-profit organizations have the resources to implement these programs at a large scale. However, this solution is unsustainable in the long term due to several challenges, including the Taliban's restrictions, limited access to electricity and internet, and widespread economic difficulties⁷⁸.

As respondents have noted, in rural and remote areas, girls who have been barred from education cannot access the online learning programs. For example, an interviewee from Helmand province reported that girls can only access online education programs in the cities of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. In other districts and particularly in remote regions, there is little information about such programs, and the necessary infrastructure such as access to electricity or internet is unavailable.

Additionally, the lack of formal accreditation for online education and the inability to provide accredited certificates or opportunities for further studies is a significant concern for many female students. However, these are not the only issues⁷⁹. Our findings indicate that just in the first 6 months of 2024, the GDI and the MPVPV closed at least 13 educational centres, including underground and online programs, across the country. These centres were providing education for girls above grade six. At least 28 administrators and students from these centres were arrested and imprisoned by the Taliban. For instance, in Badghis alone, at least three underground educational centres that offered classes to girls were shut down by the Taliban and fined during 2024⁸⁰.



A female teacher from Khost shared with Rawadari that she was secretly teaching girls who were barred from attending school but was identified and arrested by the Taliban. The Taliban forced her to commit that she would no longer conduct such activities. Another female teacher, who taught several girls in her home, was discovered by the Taliban after four months. They warned her husband that if the girls returned to her home for lessons, both the teacher and her husband would be arrested and imprisoned. Meanwhile, a female graduate who had completed university a few years earlier spent eight months teaching school subjects to local girls. She was identified by the local imam, who reported her to the Taliban. The Taliban arrested her brother and forced her to shut down the class.

Similarly, a secret educational centre in another province that was teaching German to girls was discovered by the GDI. The centre's administrator was arrested, and the course was temporarily

78 AACE- Online education as a lifeline of learning opportunities for Afghan women and girls: an interview with Sima Ahmadi, (4 October 2023): <https://aace.org/review/online-education-as-a-lifeline-of-learning-opportunities-for-afghan-women-an-interview-with-sima-ahmadi/>

79 Etilat-e-roz: "Deprivation of girls from schools; can online education be an alternative to face-to-face education", (15 April 2022): <https://www.etilaatroz.com/140543/deprivation-of-girls-from-schools-can-online-training-be-an-alternative-to-face-to-face-training/>

80 Rawadari: "The Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report 2024" (August 2024): <https://rawadari.org/130820241849.htm/>



sealed off for a week. The administrator was released from prison on bail only after promising the closure of the girls' classes.

Another interviewee from the south-western region shared that her aunt had secretly organized a class to teach school subjects to girls. This class was discovered by the PVPV department and subsequently shut down. The interviewee noted that the PVPV employees visited their home for two consecutive days to question them about the class.

Over the past three years, female students have resorted to various methods to access education. They have organized secret classes, participated in online education programs, formed book clubs and reading groups, and took turns reading and sharing books. However, each initiative was eventually identified and halted by the Taliban.

B- SCHOLARSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE

After girls were banned from attending schools and universities, families tried every possible means to secure access to education for their daughters. Many families chose to leave the country, enduring the hardships of migration to Iran, Pakistan, and other nearby or distant countries, in hopes of enabling their daughters to attend schools and universities.

At the same time, international efforts to assist Afghan girls through educational scholarships have continued. Over the past three years, universities from around the world have announced scholarships and financial aid for Afghan girls⁸¹.

Scholarships have proven to be one of the most effective ways to ensure access to education for Afghan girls. However, they are not a sustainable solution. Awareness about such opportunities is limited, especially in remote areas. Moreover, restrictions imposed by the Taliban, including the requirement for women to travel with a Mahram [Male guardian] to leave the country, hinder eligible girls from accessing these educational opportunities.

A female student from Ghazni province told Rawadari that she went to the university to request her grades in order to apply for a scholarship. However, when university officials asked her about the purpose and reason, they refused to cooperate. As a result, she missed out on an educational opportunity.

There have also been instances where the Taliban have deliberately prevented girls from traveling abroad to pursue higher education. Even girls accompanied by Mahram [lawful guardians] have faced Taliban-imposed restrictions⁸².

81 EURO News: "online education and scholarships: Global initiatives to help Afghan female students", (30 December 2022) <https://parisi.euronews.com/2022/12/30/online-training-and-scholarships-global-initiatives-to-help-afghan-girls-and-students>

82 BBC Persian, "The Taliban prevented 70 female students from going to Dubai. Students in Central Asia: we are worried about returning to Kabul", (23 August 2023): <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/cnkgz924ldno>



C- MADRASSAS [RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS]

Over the past three years, as women and girls in Afghanistan have been barred from attending schools and universities, religious schools (madrasas) have emerged as an alternative for their access to education. This approach has been endorsed and supported by the Taliban. Consequently, the Taliban's ministries of religious affairs, higher education, and education have been encouraging families to enrol their children in madrassas.

In the short term, the establishment of religious schools may appear to be a way to escape the prison-like conditions that many Afghan women and girls endure. However, in the long term, this could contribute to the spread of extremism within families⁸³. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, in his report, expressed concern about the curriculum in religious schools⁸⁴.

Recently, the Taliban's Ministry of Education announced that there are now over 21,000 madrassas across Afghanistan, staffed by 100,000 personnel hired by the Taliban. More than 3.687 million children and young people are currently engaged in religious education in these schools and Islamic learning centres. The ministry also stated that the number of public and private sc

madrassas exceed 18,000,⁸⁵ compared to the 5,000 registered religious schools⁸⁶ in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban takeover.

A respondent from Helmand noted that the number of madrassas in the province has increased significantly since the Taliban's return to power. He added that these madrassas have now become a form of business, as their instructors receive salaries from the government and also obtain financial support from families and other institutions.

Similarly, the number of madrassas in Kunduz has risen sharply, with local Taliban authorities and commanders each establishing new madrassas. Information from Kunduz indicates that some Taliban-controlled madrassas consistently spread negative propaganda against modern sciences and school curriculum, labelling them as "worldly" and unnecessary. The Taliban in these madrassas regard "modern education for girls as futile and instead emphasize acquiring religious education", which they believe brings "prosperity in both this world and hereafter."

Rawadari has learned that the Taliban are pressuring some madrassas in Kabul, Maidan Wardak and Kunar to change their curriculum in accordance to the Taliban's demands. These madrassas have been in operation since the republic era and their teachers have graduated from the Al-Azhar university in Egypt or from Saudi Arabia. The Taliban are trying to change the curriculum of all Sunni madrassas to

83 Australian Institute of International Affairs, "Taliban madrassas: a time-bomb in the making", (16 May 2024): <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/taliban-madrassas-a-time-bomb-in-the-making/>

84 Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, "the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan", (30 August 2024): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/a79330-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-afghanistan>

85 Voice of America, "Taliban: More than 21,000 madrassas and more than 1,800 schools are active in Afghanistan", (12 September 2024) <https://www.darivoa.com/a/for-the-first-time-the-number-of-religious-seminaries-increased-compared-to-schools-in-afghanistan/7781235.html>

86 TOLO News, "the government plans to bring schools under control", (8 January 2021): <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-169095>



Hanafi curriculum with Deobandi interpretation aligned with their own strict views. Additionally, the Taliban 'Supreme Leader' has ordered the GDI to review and shut down Salafi madrassas.



In most provinces, male instructors teach girls in madrassas while in some provinces, female instructors are assigned. In provinces where the level of girls' education in schools has advanced or where there is a shortage of female instructors, male teachers teach girls from inside a booth, using a loudspeaker, ensuring they cannot see the girls. Similarly, in Kandahar province, if male instructors teach girls, there must be a curtain separating them so neither the instructors can see the female student and nor can female students see their instructors. Girls are not allowed to ask questions because, according to the new PVPV law, hearing a woman's voice is considered 'Awrah' [private or forbidden].

Rawadari's findings indicated that the Taliban provide military training to children in some madrassas. For example, in Kunduz province, they have established a large school called 'Jihadi Umriya School', where most instructors are graduates of madrassas in Pakistan, particularly the Haqqani madrasa. At this school, students are trained in various programs spanning six months, one year, and two years, after which they are recruited into the Taliban's civilian and military divisions. Similarly, in another madrasa in Herat province, previously housing a teacher training center, the Taliban provide military training to students.

In Helmand province, a large school in the Zamin Dawar area of Kajaki district also provides military training to children. Rawadari's findings indicate that the Taliban train children in this school for military purposes⁸⁷. In Ghazni province, military training is also being provided in several religious schools, and recently, construction of a large religious complex has begun in the Nawa district of this province. It is understood that one of its programs will include teaching children military and combat skills.



DEPRIVING WOMEN OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

Since returning to power, the Taliban have engaged in systematic and deliberate actions to exclude women from various social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. Disregarding their legal obligations to uphold international human rights standards, they have deprived Afghan women and girls of their most fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to work, the right to education, participation in public affairs, and the right to freedom of movement⁸⁸. These discriminatory practices are pursued as official Taliban policy, pursued by the highest levels of their leadership, and openly acknowledged by their officials⁸⁹.

The deliberate and systematic deprivation of women's right to education, as outlined in this report, is part of the Taliban's official policy and organized actions implemented over the past three years. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), these actions could constitute gender persecution and qualify as a crime against humanity⁹⁰.

Gender persecution occurs when an individual or group is severely deprived of fundamental rights due to their gender identity, in violation of international laws, and when such actions are carried out intentionally as part of a widespread or systematic attack related to any act specified in Article 7(3) of the Rome Statute⁹¹. A systematic attack does not necessarily involve military operations but can include a coordinated set of actions targeting a specific civilian population⁹².

In light of this, the Taliban's deliberate deprivation of women's right to education qualifies as a crime against humanity under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Afghanistan acceded to the Rome Statute in 2003, which provides the legal basis for addressing such crimes⁹³.

88 Rawadari: "Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: Mid-year report 2023" (August 2023): <https://rawadari.org/120820231648.htm/>

89 UNGA, Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, "The Phenomenon of the institutionalized system of discrimination, segregation, disrespect for Human dignity and exclusion of women and girls" (13 May 2024), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/075/00/pdf/g2407500.pdf>

90 According to paragraph (2)(g), article 7, of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, Gender persecution is the deliberate and severe deprivation of a group or population of their fundamental rights, contrary to the standards of international law, due to their group or collective identity: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>

91 Id.

92 ... an attack is systematic if it is not sufficiently organized and random as a pattern of similar crimes, "crimes against humanity", please see: <https://cja.org/human-rights-issues/crimes-against-humanity/>

93 International Criminal Court, "Afghanistan", (7 November 2004), please see: <https://asp.icc-cpi.int/states-parties/asian-states/afghanistan>



Photo: Elaha Sahel



CONCLUSION

The Taliban's deliberate, systematic, and targeted deprivation of women's right to education blatantly violates the provisions of CEDAW and constitutes gender persecution and a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Additionally, over the past three years, the Taliban have undertaken extensive efforts to indoctrinate the education system, attempting to steer schools and universities in line with their agenda rather than toward scientific, economic, and cultural development. The changes imposed on the curricula of educational institutions—particularly the mandatory teaching of religious subjects aligned with the Taliban's interpretation—are deeply concerning and could have profoundly detrimental consequences for Afghan society, especially the future of the country's children. Therefore, addressing this crisis and mitigating the educational crisis in Afghanistan requires urgent action and measures from the international community, international organizations, media, human rights bodies, and the Afghan people.

While there is no sustainable or permanent solution other than respecting women's dignity and guaranteeing their human rights, including reopening schools and universities to provide girls and women with access to education, supporting online educational programs and offering scholarships can serve as practical, albeit temporary, options to ensure Afghan women and girls have access to their right to education to some extent.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure women's access to their right to education and address existing challenges and concerns, Rawadari proposes the following measures:

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Given that the Taliban have systematically and deliberately violated women's right to education over the past three years, they have committed gender persecution and crimes against humanity. Therefore, we call on the ICC and other UN judicial mechanisms to address this issue in accordance with their legal mandates and jurisdictions.
- By violating women's rights to education and work, the Taliban have also deprived them of other fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom from discrimination, access to healthcare services, and a decent standard of living. Therefore, we urge the international community to take concrete actions by holding the Taliban accountable and preventing further violations of Afghan women's and girls' human rights.
- We welcome the initiative to hold Afghanistan accountable for the violation of CEDAW. We applaud the group of countries leading and supporting this effort and call on more countries, particularly Muslim Majority countries to join and support this initiative to send a strong message of solidarity to women of Afghanistan and to hold the Taliban accountable for violations of women's fundamental rights.
- As highlighted in this report, the Taliban have made significant changes to school and university curricula to indoctrinating education and promote extremist views. We call on the international community to closely monitor educational institutions under Taliban control to prevent the radicalization of Afghan society and ensure the provision of appropriate education for Afghan children.
- The Taliban's PVPV law is a blatant assault to the rights of Afghan women and a clear violation of their human dignity. As Rawadari's findings indicate, following the implementation of this law, stricter restrictions have even been imposed on young girls in primary schools, where they are now required to wear masks and gloves to fully cover all parts of their body. We urge the international community to act urgently to halt the enforcement of this law.
- There is no sustainable or long-term solution to the issue of formal education for Afghan women and girls other than reopening schools and universities for them. Therefore, there is need for sustained and cohesive pressure from the region and the world to reverse all Taliban's discriminatory bans on women's rights to education, work and freedom of movement.
- We urge the international community to support scholarships and educational grants as a temporary measure to ensure Afghan women and girls can access their right to education.
- We strongly call on the international community to take effective measures to support the education of children from ethnic and religious minorities in their native languages and ensure they can learn their own history, culture, and religion.



TO THE DE FACTO AUTHORITIES:

- Afghanistan is a party to binding international human rights instruments, including the CEDAW, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), all of which recognize the right to education for all individuals without exception or discrimination. Therefore, we call on the de facto authorities to fulfil their legal obligations under these treaties and immediately reopen schools and universities for Afghan women and girls.
- The ongoing deliberate deprivation of women and girls of their right to education constitutes a clear violation of the provisions of CEDAW, carrying serious legal consequences. We urge the ruling authorities to avoid further tarnishing their human rights record and respect and uphold women's right to education as a fundamental human right.
- We call on the de facto authorities to respect the educational rights of children from ethnic minorities, including the right to education in their native language and the teaching of their history, culture, and religion. Additionally, we urge them to ensure access to education for children with disabilities including girls and women.

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