

Denied the Human Right to Education

FACTS ON THE SITUATION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

UNESCO estimates that 129 million girls are out of school worldwide and the negative effects are enormous. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's system of gender apartheid is denying girls over the age of 12 the right to an education. **Afghanistan is the only country in the world to officially bar girls from education.** This repression is causing serious harm to a generation of girls, exposing them to risk of early marriage, spiraling poverty, a rise in poor health outcomes, increased risk of gender-based violence, and much more. We must continue to press the international community to act with urgency in defense of their rights.

BARRIERS AND CONSEQUENCES

Child Marriage

When young girls are denied access to education, they are at an increased risk of child marriage, where they may end up bearing children at a very young and fragile age and face subsequent health risks. In Afghanistan, child marriage is on the rise as spiralling levels of poverty force parents to make the unthinkable choice of marrying off or selling some of their children to feed others. **According to UN Women, access to education encourages girls to marry later and have fewer children.** Girls with secondary schooling are 6 times less likely to become child brides.

Poverty

According to the UN, 97 percent of Afghanistan's citizens may soon be living below the poverty line, and 95% of households don't currently have enough to eat. **The education ban faced by adolescent girls in Afghanistan contributes to this poverty and is exacerbated by the fact that women aren't allowed to join the workforce.** When parents can't afford to send their children to school, poverty persists across generations.

A [report by UNAMA](#) indicates that girls are more likely than boys in Afghanistan to stop attending school due to child labour. According to the World Bank, a single year of primary school has been shown to increase women's wages later in life by 10 to 20 percent, while the returns to female secondary education are between 15 percent and 25 percent.

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Mental and Physical Wellbeing

When girls are denied access to education, this can limit their knowledge of health and nutrition for themselves and their children, leading to increased maternal and infant mortality rates. A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past the age of 5 than a child born to an illiterate mother.

According to UNESCO, if all women completed primary school, the number of pregnancy and childbirth deaths would fall by approximately two-thirds. A lack of education also impacts a girl's mental health as it leads to isolation which can manifest in higher levels of depression. **According to Amnesty International, Afghan girls report that being barred from school is contributing to very high levels of mental and physical stress, including depression and suicidal thoughts.**



Gender-based Violence

Girls and women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence in situations where they are denied access to education. **Denying girls the human right to education is a form of gender violence in itself**, as it attempts to erase women and girls from society. Schools and learning environments can serve as safe spaces for women and girls to learn about their rights and develop advocacy skills.

If done effectively, education systems can also serve as a point of access to other humanitarian services, such as healthcare and food aid. On the other hand, **an education system under Taliban rule can turn schools into sites of violence for both boys and girls.**

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WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT EDUCATION FOR AFGHAN GIRLS AND WOMEN?



There are a number of practical steps that the international community can take to protect and enhance the right to education for Afghan girls and women. [Read the recommendations](#) developed by Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, and [visit our website](#) to learn about how you can take action.

The right to education is protected by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in part:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

Signatories must commit to recognize the right of the child to education...with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.