

Fact Sheet Women in Higher Education

Historical Background

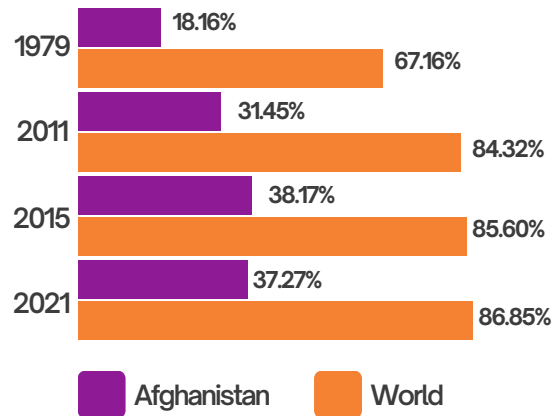
Afghanistan exhibits the most pronounced gender gap in primary education in the world with only 71 girls in primary school for every 100 boys. With only 21% of girls completing primary education, there are even fewer girls who pursue secondary education, affecting the participation of young women in higher education.

Strand, 2015

Afghanistan Literacy Rate

World Bank, 2023

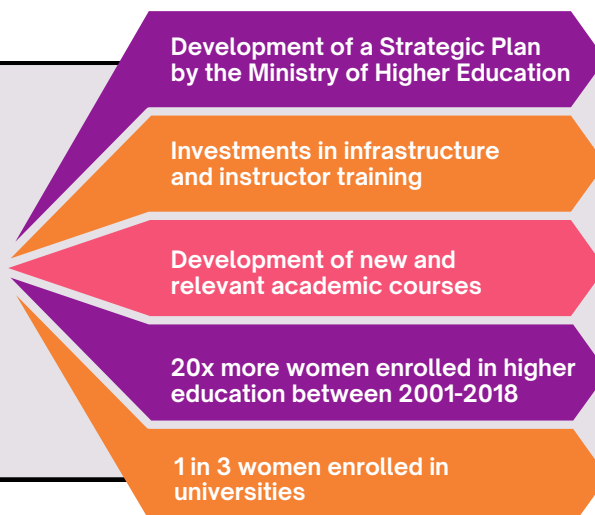
Adults aged 15 and older who can both read and write.



Hayward & Karim, 2019

After the Taliban rule ended in 2001, Afghanistan saw dramatic growth in higher education opportunities from 2001 to 2021.

UNESCO, 2023



By 2020, there were over 100,000 Afghan women enrolled in public or private universities and 2,439 female lecturers.

Ahmadi & Sultan, 2023



There was a university in each of the 34 provinces across the country. Older universities updated their curricula and added new and contemporary courses.



Private institutions opened in the capital city of Kabul, focusing on offering skills demanded by the evolving Afghan economy, including business administration, computer science, accounting, management, and English language.



Women had rejoined colleges and universities and secured academic positions in teaching colleges and law, and in other areas where they were previously under-represented, such as agriculture.

2021 - Present

Some limited forms of higher education have remained open to women such as some midwifery training institutes, private institutes providing English classes, and other courses, but women can no longer earn a degree or diploma from any accredited institute in the country. Accessing these limited opportunities is also challenging, as the ruling Taliban regime has issued decrees that include discontinuing the issuance of driver's licenses, requiring a male escort when commuting, and other restrictions. Since 2021, the national exams – which determine university entrance – have been held annually without any women sitting the exams.

The ban on university attendance in Afghanistan has driven thousands of Afghan women to enroll in fully online universities, such as University of the People. Others seek to leave the country in order to access higher education in other countries. But for many, such alternatives are not accessible. Many women cannot afford a device and reliable internet access, or the cost of travel and tuition to study abroad.

August 2021

The Taliban ban girls from attending school beyond 6th grade.

March 2022

1 million girls have been prevented from attending secondary school

December 2022

The Taliban ban women from attending university.

In 2023, there were no girls who graduated from the 12th grade in Afghanistan.



Before the Taliban closed higher education for women in December 2022, they issued decrees making it more difficult for women to pursue higher education:

Enforced gender-segregated classrooms

Excluded women from university entrance exams

Excluded women from exit exams for medical students

Ordered female university students to cover their faces in classrooms

Banned issuing transcripts and certificates for female university graduates

Forbade private education institutions from having female students

Banned female students from taking videos and photos on university campuses

Blocked women from choosing agriculture, mining, civil engineering, veterinary medicine, and journalism as their majors as these were deemed “too difficult for women.”

Ahmadi & Sultan, 2023



Afghanistan's economy is estimated to lose US\$9.6B by 2066 if the suspension of women's access to higher education remains in place.

UN Women, 2024

Preventing half of the population from pursuing higher education has a far-reaching impact across all aspects of development, such as literacy, health outcomes, poverty, and economic growth and development.

Recognizing the urgency and gravity of the situation, many Afghans, Afghan diaspora, and the international community have come together to find ways for women and girls to continue their education.

Non-profit organizations, multilateral, and international funding agencies have facilitated scholarships and grants, created literacy and skills development opportunities, and developed female teacher training hubs to ensure the quality of teaching and learning of institutional partners in Afghanistan.

How CW4WAfghan Helps Restore Access to Higher Education



Through grants, scholarships, online learning opportunities, and advocacy tools, CW4WAfghan works to make the right to learn a reality of Afghan women and girls.

Learn more about our programs:

- [Remote Communication Assistance](#)
- [Our Higher Education Campaign Toolkit](#)
- [Shafia Fund Scholarships](#)
- [Online courses at DD Courses](#)

What Can You Do?



Access CW4WAfghan's [Higher Education Toolkit](#) and learn more about what you can do to support Afghan women and girls.

CW4WAfghan is a member of the [Alliance for Education Women in Afghanistan](#). By working together, we can provide quality education opportunities for women and girls in Afghanistan, foster empowerment, and contribute to a more equitable society.

 Canadian Women *for* Women in Afghanistan
Making the Right to Learn a Reality