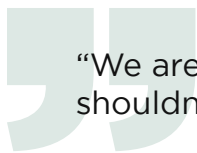


ARTICLE 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular, to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- a. The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- b. Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- c. The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
- d. The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- e. The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;
- f. The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- g. The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- h. Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.



“We are girls. We are from Afghanistan. We are humans. Why shouldn’t we go to school? What crime have we committed?”

—Anonymous schoolgirl in Afghanistan¹

“In my province we had girls that could be singers, professors, athletes and politicians. Now we have nothing left. All of those talents were arrested, left the country, or now live in hiding. Families rush to marry their daughters because they are afraid the Taliban may take them for marriage. Most girls are forced to marry. This is a nightmare I never imagined to happen.”

—Anonymous women teacher in Afghanistan²

“We women of Afghanistan will never surrender. The Taliban needs to know that women and girls will not be silenced. We are not weak. We are not victims. We will raise our voices against discrimination and inequality”.

—A 16-year-old schoolgirl and aspiring musician³

Introduction

Article 10 of CEDAW establishes the obligation of States Parties to guarantee women and girls equal rights in the field of education and training. It encompasses access to all levels and forms of education, including preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary, and adult education, as well as technical and vocational training. The Article emphasizes not only equal access but also the quality and content of education, calling for the elimination of gender-based stereotypes that may be perpetuated through curricula, teaching materials, and pedagogical practices.

A central element of Article 10 is the requirement that educational environments promote gender equality through the revision of textbooks and curricula to reflect non-stereotypical and equitable representations of women and men. Women must be provided equal access to educational resources, including qualified teaching personnel, school facilities, and learning equipment. The Article also underscores the importance of equal opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other forms of financial assistance for study, as well as access to continuing and adult education programs.

Furthermore, Article 10 calls for targeted measures to address and reduce the dropout rates of female students and to reintegrate women and girls who have left the education system prematurely. It also promotes women’s participation in sports and physical education, recognizing the role of physical activity in personal development and social inclusion. In addition, the Article stresses the importance of providing women with specific educational content related to family life and well-being, including reproductive health and family planning. More broadly, CEDAW’s educational provisions aim to eliminate illiteracy among women and girls, ensuring that they are equally equipped to engage in all aspects of social, economic, and political life.⁴

Beginning with the US-backed overthrow of the first Taliban regime in December 2001 through August 2021, Afghan girls’ enrollment in primary school surged from nearly zero to approximately 2.5 million girls, and 40 percent of schoolchildren were girls.⁵ From 2003 to 2018, girls’ secondary school enrollment increased from 6 percent to approximately 40 percent.⁶ Afghanistan significantly expanded access to higher education for both young women and men. Over 410,000 co-ed university students were enrolled throughout the state’s 170 public and private universities, and nearly 37,200 professors and administrative staff offered a wide breadth of diverse fields of study.⁷ Moreover, women’s attendance in tertiary education institutions boasted 90,000 female students in 2018, a substantial increase from 5,000 in 2007.⁸ By 2020, 30 percent of university professors were women, and over 110,000 women attended colleges and universities in Afghanistan, representing over 20 percent of all students attending.⁹

Girls’ and Young Women’s Primary and Secondary Education

On August 30, 2021, the all-male, madrasa-educated senior Taliban appointees to the Ministry of Education barred co-education and prohibited men from teaching girls and women from teaching boys, even in primary school.¹⁰ The Taliban mandated compulsory uniforms for women teaching in primary school and madrasas (religious schools), and, in June 2022, in central Afghanistan, the Taliban decreed that girls in primary school must wear hijab in school and completely cover their faces when traveling to and from school or be expelled.¹¹

The Taliban leadership banned secondary education for girls in September 2021, soon after they took power. They announced schooling beyond the primary level would reopen for girls, but then almost immediately announced that secondary school for girls would remain closed indefinitely.¹²

Girls are no longer allowed to attend school beyond sixth grade. A 14-year-old schoolgirl expressed her dismay at being banned from school: “Education is an important part of our life and if we can’t go to school, we lose hope. And without hope, we lose our life.”¹³ The mother of an 8th-grade student forced from school explained: “My daughter puts on her uniform several times a day. She talks to herself all day about school, her teachers, and her classmates. I feel helpless.”¹⁴

According to the World Bank, barred from secondary school, some girls began repeating lower grade levels to remain in primary school longer.¹⁵ The Taliban then barred girls perceived to be older than ten years old from attending classes below the sixth grade.¹⁶ On August 8, 2023, the Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice ordered officials and school administrators in provinces to prohibit taller girls or girls they perceived to be older than ten years old from entering school premises, even if they were actually under ten years of age.¹⁷ In some provinces, the Taliban ordered headmasters of girls’ schools to examine students for signs of puberty and expel any girl who showed signs of physical maturation.¹⁸ This has meant that Head Masters and Taliban enforcers have sent some girls in the third grade home without the option to return.¹⁹

Girls allowed to attend school between grades 1 and 6 are confronted with additional barriers to accessing their right to education.²⁰ Their schools lack a sufficient amount of all-female teaching staff and proper sanitation and hygiene facilities.²¹ In conjunction with official Taliban rules, some girls disclosed that their parents, siblings, and community members support restrictions against girls’ education, even for primary school-aged girls, due to real or perceived risks concerning the Taliban attacking students or schools, compliance, lack of female teachers, and or their conservative perspectives.²² A 15-year-old girl forced out of school stated, “This is my message to the world: I used to be holding a pen and book and now I’m holding a broom—it’s a symbol of hopelessness.”²³

Taliban authorities have also installed new female teachers and principals who have been educated in fundamentalist madrassas. These women are tasked with enforcing the Taliban’s strict dress requirements, requiring all-concealing clothing for women and girls.²⁴ Many girls are required to walk two to three hours in long black burqas or all-encompassing hijabs to school and have described suffering from

heat stroke and shortness of breath during hotter months.²⁵ One teacher disclosed the presence of Taliban informants in schools who are responsible for monitoring and reporting any violations of the strict dress code. Violating teachers were fired and students were expelled without recourse.²⁶ A girl student stated: “We are not allowed to wear belts. Our sleeves should be large to hide our elbows and the shape of our arms. But then we were reprimanded because when we write on the board, our sleeves roll back and our arms are revealed.... One day we are asked to have loose sleeves, and the next day we are admonished for it.”²⁷

Reports have appeared of Taliban enforcers beating elementary school students and teachers with electrical cables, sticks, or gun butts for not keeping their faces entirely covered on school premises.²⁸ Many families cannot afford full hijabs or burqas for their daughters and are subsequently prohibited from attending school or leaving the house out of fear of violent consequences by Taliban enforcers.²⁹ Many schools have been destroyed by the Taliban, while others have been turned into Taliban military bases.³⁰

According to the World Bank, as of October 2023, only 3 percent of girls were attending secondary school nationally, with an insignificant difference between urban and rural areas.³¹ By December 2023, over 80 percent of secondary school-age girls were not enrolled, indicating a reversal of nearly two decades of improving attendance rates.³² UNICEF reported that as of September 2024, the ban has impacted approximately 2,200,000 Afghan girls.³³ A 15-year-old girl forced out of school explains: “With this current situation, when I look at my future, it will look like it does today—carrying water from faraway places and working. If you look at other societies, women are educated and empowered. So why are we held back compared to other women? This makes me sad, and it makes me cry.”³⁴

Implementation and enforcement of these declarations have been uneven across Afghan provinces. Not all members of the Taliban Authority appear aligned with all the decrees. However, dissenting beliefs are typically kept in the margins as the Taliban leadership demands obedience to quell internal conflict and disunity.³⁵ Additionally, most Taliban members are illiterate and are insulated within a community in which accurate information about Islam is not easily accessible, and

thus continue to follow their leadership's directives and interpretations.³⁶

Women's Tertiary and University Education

On September 29, 2021, the Taliban banned women from attending and teaching at Kabul University, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the country. Over the next several months, women's access to higher education came under attack. By February 2022, the Taliban was forcing universities across the country to sex segregate their students and professors. On April 29, 2022, women's attendance at universities was limited to three days a week. The same day, the Taliban ordered all women students and professors to cover their faces while on campus. On October 7, 2022, women students were blocked from choosing agriculture, mining, civil engineering, veterinary, and journalism majors, and women faculty were prohibited from teaching these subjects. The Taliban then increased the number of classes and credits for courses with their approved version of Islamic content.³⁷

At first, the Taliban prohibited older girls and women from holding professorial and student positions at public universities until a segregated structure could be implemented. Female university students were required to attend classes on separate days of the week, mandated to cover their faces, and banned from several academic fields that the Taliban deemed inappropriate for older girls and women. On December 20, 2022, the spokesperson of the Taliban's Higher Education Ministry, Hafiz Ziaullah Hashemi, shared a letter signed by the acting Education Minister, Sheikh Neda Mohammad Nadim, directing all public and private universities and educational institutions to immediately cease admission of female students.³⁸ This ban amplified the effects of the ban on girls' secondary school attendance. Now, even if girls and women are permitted to return to college in the future, many will be unable to meet the secondary education prerequisites.³⁹

On December 26, 2022, Taliban enforcers sprayed women students standing near the entrance of Takhar University in Takhar Province with a water cannon and beat them.⁴⁰ Other girls and women protesting the ban at Badakhshan University in Badakhshan Province were hitting and kicking the entry gates, demanding they be given access

to attend classes; Taliban enforcers attacked and assaulted them.⁴¹

In January 2023, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education ordered all institutions of higher education to exclude females from university entry exams. As a result, none of the 84,234 high school graduates who participated in the 2023 university entrance exams were girls or women.⁴²

Women who graduated from medical programs before the ban on women in universities petitioned the Taliban to permit them to take their exit exams, a necessary measure for them to undertake their medical practice. The Taliban denied their request.⁴³ It became the discretion of local Taliban authorities whether girl and women attendees were able to study health sciences and attend institutions specific to midwifery, nursing, or dentistry.⁴⁴ In December 2024, the Taliban banned females from all medical training, closing off one of the last remaining areas for girls and women to receive an education.⁴⁵

Girls and women who graduated before the tertiary education ban have faced difficulties in procuring their academic documentation due to Taliban mahram requirements regarding university administrative procedures.⁴⁶ The mahram requirements have also inhibited girls and women with higher education scholarships abroad from accessing those opportunities.⁴⁷

The Taliban's ban on girls and women receiving an education is intended to suppress the voice, capacity, and power of girls and women.⁴⁸ In addition to violating international human rights law, the Taliban's policies are in direct contradiction to the teachings of the Quran, which oblige every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge.⁴⁹ Exiled Afghan politician Sahira Sharif stated, "The Taliban understand that if a girl is educated, it means that the entire family is educated. The Taliban and their allies are frightened of educated and intelligent women. They apply the saying: 'If you want to destroy a society, take the pen out of its hands.'"⁵⁰

Alternative Religious Education for Girls and Women

As they attempt to eradicate most primary and secondary secular education, Taliban education officials are promoting madrasas. According to a Taliban official at Afghanistan's Education Ministry,

“Principally, there is no difference between a school and a madrasa.”⁵¹ In the Paktika province, the Taliban created nearly 600 religious schools over two years, as well as converting secular educational institutions into jihadi madrasas.⁵² Male university students reported that they have to attend compulsory religious lessons dictated by the Taliban.⁵³ Reports from February 2024 indicate that approximately 37 percent of girls attending school up to sixth grade are enrolled in “alternative educational setups”—largely informal Islamic religious institutions or madrasas.⁵⁴

The madrasas teach the girls basic Islamic jurisprudence and religious texts. The coursework also focuses on shaping girls’ understanding of their expected roles within society, which includes guidance on marrying a pious Muslim man, adhering to conservative gender norms, and dedicating themselves to domestic responsibilities. In these madrasas, girls are taught to serve and be obedient to male members of their families, their husbands, their husbands’ families, and to produce children. A significant ideological emphasis is placed on the upbringing of devout and morally upright children—particularly sons—who are expected to contribute to the continuation of the Islamic struggle, or jihad.⁵⁵

Taliban violence against female students and teachers persists. In May 2023, two female teachers connected to a *Bamyan darul uloom* (Islamic seminary and educational institution) were reportedly beaten and detained by Taliban members after attempting to welcome the visiting Minister of Education at the inauguration of a new jihadi madrasa.⁵⁶

On another occasion, on September 30, 2022, a suicide bombing killed 53 people at a Hazara education facility for girls in Kabul. The Taliban responded to protests by university students on October 11, 2022, against these and other killings of Hazaras by expelling approximately 60 female Hazara students from the Kabul University dormitories. The Taliban warned the Hazara students they would not hesitate to retaliate further if the expulsions were divulged to news media.⁵⁷

Clandestine Courses and NGO-Facilitated Education for Girls and Women

Afghan girls and women have continued to fight for their right to learn through clandestine educational courses. Taliban forces are aware of clandestine organized courses and schools and are vigilant in their endeavors to identify and shut them down. One such covert education course was discovered by the Taliban in Daikundi province in June 2023, and dismantled immediately.⁵⁸ In Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, only weeks prior, an undisclosed number of teachers of a clandestine girls’ school were captured and detained by the Taliban after they raided the school.⁵⁹ In addition to having to remain hidden from the Taliban, other secret schools for girls struggle with students’ inability to afford internet access or maintain connectivity.

One father expressed both his fear and commitment to his daughter’s education saying: “From the time when my daughter leaves home for school until she comes home safely, I consider that she might be dead, and I think that the Taliban will come and kill me because I’m committing the crime of letting my daughter go to school. But I will continue committing this crime for the future of my daughters and my country. Today, illiterate people are in power, bringing the country to its terrible state. I don’t want my daughter to be illiterate.”⁶⁰

NGOS were operating educational institutions that allowed girls to attend in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. However, on April 27, 2023, the Taliban Minister of Education called for the suspension of their activities.⁶¹ At the time of the shut-down, reports indicate that educational provisions were being administered by 176 NGOs, and that UNICEF had offered approximately 5,000 classes to local students.⁶² In June 2023, Taliban authorities ordered the cessation of NGO-run educational programs by UNICEF, Save the Children, and ACTED in Sar-e-Pol and Faryab provinces.⁶³ Closures of NGO educational programming resulted in the termination of community-based quality education for over 500,000 children, including 300,000 girls.⁶⁴

Those speaking out and advocating for girls and women’s rights to education face suppression, arrest, and violent reprisal by the Taliban. For example, a male journalism professor, Ismail Mashal, tore up his diploma on television to protest the Taliban’s ban

on girls and women receiving an education. He was detained, imprisoned, and tortured by the Taliban. Upon his release, he was wheelchair-bound with significant mental health issues from the torture and abuse he suffered.⁶⁵

Results of the Violation of Girls' and Women's Right to Education

Maashoqa, a 17-year-old former student in Badakhshan province, dreamed of becoming a teacher. Instead, she was forcibly married in April 2023 to an illiterate man 10 years older when the Taliban banned girls from attending secondary school and university. Fearing the Taliban ban was permanent, "When the suitor came, my family quickly agreed; they didn't care about what I wanted," she said. She soon became pregnant. Many of her female classmates were also forcibly married, some as young as 14 years old. "These days when we talk to each other, I see that each of our fates is more bitter than the others," she says.⁶⁶

Girls have also been forced to forfeit their education in exchange for becoming child laborers, where they spend long days working on their family farms, serve as domestic laborers in the homes of other people, caregivers for their siblings or livestock, weave carpets, or collect sources of drinking water far from their homes.⁶⁷

A 14-year-old girl forced out of school by the Taliban explained: "Most of the time, I bake bread for the community, and this is how I earn money for the family. For one piece of bread, I only earn 4 Afs (USD \$0.05). I also tend to our animals. I'm underage but doing hard labor. Many children are now involved in child labor. If I reach 17 or 18 years of age and I'm still not in school, my parents may engage me to someone. School is better than getting married. But if schools don't open, then parents will be obliged to engage their daughters."⁶⁸

Banning girls and women from attending school reinforces the Taliban's extreme patriarchal norms and isolates girls and women from their communities, stunting their social development, limiting their ability to form support networks, and preventing them from pursuing their aspirations.⁶⁹ Without the support networks provided in school settings, girls face increased child protection issues such as exploitation, child marriage, domestic abuse, and other forms of sexual and gender-based

violence and discrimination.⁷⁰ Girls are pushed into child marriages, which results in their becoming child mothers. Their girl children are then at greater risk of being uneducated, impoverished child mothers.⁷¹

A 16-year-old former schoolgirl said: "If there is no education and the situation continues, a generation of girls will face a dark future and they won't have any rights. There won't be enough teachers—a problem we already face. If there are no female teachers, what will be the future of this community?"⁷²

According to research by the United States Institute for Peace, because of the violation of their right to education, girls are reportedly exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, along with an overwhelming sense of purposelessness and uncertainty about the future.⁷³ A 16-year-old girl forced out of school by the Taliban stated: "I've been out of school for 13 months now. I'm happy for children still going to school, but I'm also upset and unhappy for the girls in my community. We want these opportunities too."⁷⁴

Girls now banned from school have reported feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness, diminished self-esteem, isolation, stress, and shame that they are unable to read and write.⁷⁵

Reflecting on her life since she was forced out of school, a 16-year-old girl explained: "In reality, when we think, we don't live, we are just alive. Think of us like a moving dead body in Afghanistan."⁷⁶ Some girls have resorted to narcotic use as an escape mechanism and form of 'alternate reality,' exacerbating Afghanistan's drug epidemic.⁷⁷

In contrast to Taliban assertions of improved mental health and decreased suicides among women and girls, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls reported that suicides have increased, particularly among girls prohibited from attending school.⁷⁸ In a March 2023 survey, 47.6 percent of respondents, 1,005 people, knew at least one girl or woman suffering from anxiety or depression since the Taliban takeover.⁷⁹ Additionally, 7.8 percent of respondents (164) knew a girl or woman who had taken her own life.⁸⁰

Restrictions on girls' and women's education limit their access to information concerning reproductive health, including contraception and safe childbirth

methods.⁸¹ Wider implications include an increase in impoverished populations, increased migration, a rise in family violence, increased societal illiteracy, and an overarching loss of opportunities, autonomy, and self-agency.⁸² Without the inclusion of educated girls and women, Afghanistan's economy, culture, politics, and governance will suffer. Half of Afghanistan's human capital has been cut off, causing a near-complete shortage of female professionals in both private and public sectors.⁸³

The Taliban's denial of girls' and women's right to education denies them future job opportunities, solidifies their economic insecurity, and perpetuates cyclical poverty and dependence in the long term.⁸⁴ A rapid gender analysis conducted by UNICEF between August 2021 and August 2022 indicated that the ban on girls' and women's education and the subsequent impact on the job market projected

a decrease in Afghanistan's GDP by 2.5 percent, or \$500 million.⁸⁵ The analysis projected that if the three million girls in the current cohort of girls were allowed to complete their secondary education, they could collectively contribute at least US\$5.4 billion to Afghanistan's economy.⁸⁶

The decrease in the number of girls and women being educated reduces the number of female teachers and health practitioners, which will lead to the decline of access to educational and health services for all Afghans (See Article 12.)⁸⁷ Afghanistan is already recognized for having some of the highest rates of maternal, infant, and child mortality in the world; experts warn that the nation is advancing toward a far worse public health crisis due to the Taliban-implemented educational prohibitions.

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