



## **CSW- TOPIC 2: Measures to strengthen the education of women and girls in Afghanistan and Iran**

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1. Information on the topic

Due to a shortage of educational institutions, lengthy travel times, and social and cultural obstacles, many children, particularly females in Afghanistan and Iran, do not have access to a formal education. Another significant issue is poor infrastructure. Basic amenities like classrooms, tables, and textbooks are frequently absent from schools in Afghanistan and Iran, which can compromise the quality of instruction and deter pupils from attending. Even when kids have access to school, the quality of that education may be subpar due to outdated curricula, poor teaching practices, and inadequate teaching resources. The lack of funding for Afghanistan's and Iran's educational systems restricts the resources that can be used to raise the standard and accessibility of education. Because of this, inadequate funding is also a significant issue.

Girls and women may not have access to education or be discouraged from pursuing higher education due to social and cultural conventions including early marriage and discrimination based on gender.

Afghanistan and other countries in the region are experiencing ongoing conflict and political instability, which has damaged schools, kept kids out of class, and disrupted the educational system. These difficulties have impeded efforts to advance gender equality and sustainable development by resulting in low enrolment and completion rates, particularly among girls and women.

## 2. Which regions are affected?

In certain regions of the world, girls often face greater barriers to gaining an education, which exacerbates the loss of education among women and girls. Some of the regions where education loss of women and girls is more common include:

**Sub-Saharan Africa:** Poverty, early marriage, cultural beliefs that prioritize boys' education, conflict, and cultural beliefs concerning girls' education are major barriers to girls' education in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

**South Asia:** Often, in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, girls' education is hindered by poverty, child marriage, gender-based violence, and cultural beliefs that emphasize boys' education.

**Middle East and North Africa.** Cultural beliefs that prioritize boys' education, conflict, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure limit girls' education in some Middle Eastern and North African countries.

**Latin America and the Caribbean:** Despite recent progress, girls in some parts of Latin America and the Caribbean still face barriers to education, including poverty, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence.

**Central Asia:** Poor economic conditions, early marriage, and cultural beliefs favouring boys' education limit the education of girls in some countries in Central Asia.

## 3. What, particularly, is the issue?

Years of war and instability in Afghanistan have caused that the infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is destroyed, making it impossible for many girls to attend education. Girls' education has also been hampered by social and cultural impediments such early marriage, discrimination based on gender, and insecurity. Because of this, only 15% of Afghan girls enrol in high education and only 37% of Afghan girls attend elementary school.

Iran has made great strides in recent years, but girls still face several obstacles to obtaining an education, such as gender discrimination, poverty, and cultural traditions that place more value on a boy's education. Girls' access to education is hampered in certain rural areas by a dearth of schools, subpar infrastructure, and great distances. While Iran's total literacy rate is excellent, there are noticeable gender inequalities, with female literacy rates falling behind male literacy rates.

#### 4. why is it problematic?

There are major negative effects on people, families, and societies as a result of women and girls' underachievement in education in Iran and Afghanistan. It restricts possibilities for professional and personal growth, maintains gender disparities, and stymies advancements in fields like human rights, health, and social and economic development.

For a number of reasons, it is problematic that women and girls in Afghanistan and Iran are losing their education:

1. It maintains gender inequality: Girls and women are less likely to have equal possibilities for personal and economic growth when they are denied access to education. The potential for advancement in other areas, such as health, human rights, social and economic development, is constrained by this, which perpetuates gender inequities.
2. It prevents economic growth. Education access is a key element in fostering economic growth and development. Girls and women are less able to participate fully in the workforce and contribute to economic growth and development when they lack access to education.
3. This has implications for social and cultural norms: Promoting social and cultural change relies heavily on education. Girls and women who receive an education are more inclined to question gender norms and stereotypes and work to create inclusive and equal societies.
4. It makes people poor: Education is a crucial instrument for eradicating poverty. Girls and women who receive an education are more likely to have access to better career possibilities and to be able to support their families, which lowers the risk that they will live in poverty.
5. It impacts health outcomes Education is linked to better health outcomes, particularly for women and children. Girls and women who receive an education are more likely to be knowledgeable about good hygiene and health practices and to be able to make wise decisions regarding their own and their families' health.

Because it restricts their prospects for professional and personal growth, upholds gender inequity, and hinders advancement in other development fields, the decline in education among women and girls in Afghanistan and Iran is an issue.

#### 5. What has been done so far to make a difference?

There have been numerous initiatives in Afghanistan and Iran to increase women's and girls' access to education, but development has been difficult and slowly occurring.

##### **Afghanistan:**

1. Building infrastructure and schools: Over the past 20 years, enormous investments have been made in building infrastructure and schools, especially in urban areas. Additionally, the government is working to boost the number of female teachers, particularly in rural areas.
2. Offering financial incentives: Initiatives like the National Solidarity Program (NSP) have offered communities financial incentives to support girls' education and establish schools.

3. Fostering community involvement: By highlighting the advantages of education for both people and communities, NGOs and other organizations have attempted to include communities in promoting girls' education.
4. Supporting girls' education in conflict-affected areas: Institutions like UNICEF and the Norwegian Refugee Council have put initiatives in place to assist girls' education in conflict-affected areas, including by setting up temporary learning spaces and supplying secure transportation.
5. Rising enrolment: From 2001 to 2017, girls' primary attendance rates rose from 3% to 36% at the primary level and from less than 1% to 16% at the secondary level.
6. Developing infrastructure and schools: Since 2001, Afghanistan has seen a huge increase in the number of schools, with many of the new ones being constructed in rural areas.
7. Improving teacher preparation: The Afghan government has worked to train teachers and boost the number of female instructors, particularly in rural areas.

#### **Iran:**

1. Increased access to education: In recent decades, the Iranian government has made enormous investments in education, especially for girls. Schools are now more prevalent, and transportation infrastructure has improved, especially in rural areas.
2. Offering financial incentives: The government, particularly in rural regions, has established programs that offer cash incentives to families to persuade them to send their daughters to school.
3. Encourage community participation by highlighting the advantages of education for both people and communities. NGOs and other organizations have sought to include communities in supporting girls' education.
4. Dismantling social and cultural hurdles: To address social and cultural impediments to girls' education, the government has put in place programs that promote gender equality and question conventional gender norms.
5. Dismantling social and cultural barriers: The Iranian government has put in place measures to deal with social and cultural obstacles to girls' education, such as advancing gender equality and questioning conventional gender norms.

Although both nations have made progress, there are still numerous obstacles to overcome, particularly in regions afflicted by conflict and insecurity. To remove the obstacles to girls' education, advance gender equality, and foster social and economic development, more work is required.

6. What did these attempts to a solution look like and who was involved?

The difficulties that women and girls in Afghanistan and Iran experience in their educational pursuits have been addressed by a wide range of people and organizations. Here are a few instances:

1. Governments: Both the Afghan and Iranian governments have worked to promote women and girls' access to education, notably by creating policies and initiatives to boost enrolment and raise the standard of instruction.
2. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): A range of domestic and international NGOs have contributed to initiatives to support girls' education, including through constructing schools, offering scholarships, and encouraging community involvement.
3. United Nations agencies: Several UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and UN Women, have worked to advance gender equality and the education of girls in Iran and Afghanistan.
4. Donors and International Organizations: The World Bank, USAID, and the European Union are just a few of the international donors and organizations that have contributed financially and technically to initiatives to enhance girls' education and advance gender equality.
5. Communities and families: Communities and families have also helped to advance the education of girls by helping to establish schools, promoting the cause, and providing financial and social support for girls' attendance in school.

7. What were the consequences of the efforts and why is there still an issue?

**Afghanistan:**

From 2001 to 2018 the number of girls in schools increased from 1 million to 10 million. The number of girls in primary school went from almost zero to 2,5 million. In 2021, 4 out of 10 students in primary school were girls.

The attendance of women in higher education increased by 20 times from 5,000 women in 2001 to 100,000 in 2021 and the percentage of women being able to read almost doubled from 17% in 2001 to 30% in 2021.

But the issue is far from solved. Even though the country saw a huge increase of girls receiving education, still 3.5 million children were out of school in 2017 and 85% percent of them are girls. Another comparison of girls is visible in the literacy rate of adolescents in Afghanistan. Almost two times more boys with a percentage of 66 are literate compared to 37% of adolescent girls. Even issues that have been tackled directly are still not gone. For example, the rate of female teachers in the year 2017 is in most provinces still under 20% which is a major problem considering that a lot of families won't accept their daughter receiving education from a man. This also shows that the work of promoting the importance of girls' education is still not done and they often face discrimination even by their own family.

On top of these already major unsolved problems, the "return" of the Taliban makes it far more complicated, to say the least. The Taliban is a radical Islamic terrorist organisation that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. 20 years after their expulsion, led by the United States of America, the Taliban regained the power in Afghanistan again. During their reign they prohibited next to TV, music and other leisure activities especially women a lot. Women weren't allowed to go to school, leave the house without their husband or even go to the hospital. Violations were punished hardly. After the "9/11 attack" in 2001 by the terror organisation Al-Qaida the Taliban weren't extraditing the protected and in Afghanistan living leader of the Al-Qaida Osama Bin Laden to the USA. As a result, the USA started the operation "Operation

Enduring Freedom" to drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan and leave Bin Laden without protection. After this expulsion the government of Afghanistan regained the power and started with the previous described efforts.

In 2021, the western military troops helped the Afghanistan government providing freedom in their country were retracted which led to a change of power from the Afghanistan government to the Taliban. At the beginning of their regained power the Taliban promised all women work as well as political activity, but the reality looks different.

Quickly after the change of power girls were excluded from secondary education. Even though the Taliban never prohibited the attendance of secondary education of girls they still can't go since according to the Taliban the security situation has to improve. These tactics were already used during the first reign of the Taliban to stop girls from going to school and during this time the security situation "never improved" which is why girls could never go to school. The tertiary education under the Taliban is still available to women but only under specific rules. Women attending the tertiary education must be separated from men and can only be taught by women. In addition, female professors are only ten percent of all professors in Afghanistan.

About one and a half years after the change of power, in December 2022, the Taliban further reduced the access to tertiary education of women. All public and private universities were advised by the government to exclude women from their university. One month later the Taliban prohibited all women to attend any entrance examinations of universities. This prohibition reduced the hope for a possible opening of the universities for women next year radically.

The current state is now that there is no sign of any abolition of these exclusions by the Taliban. This means that women and girls in Afghanistan won't be able to be educated any further after the primary education in the future.

### Iran:

As a result of the previously mentioned efforts in the last decades rose the literacy rate of women from 42 percent in the year 1976 to 99 percent in 2021. Looking at the percentage of women attending tertiary education it is noticeable that after a big increase from 2 percent in 1976 to 67 percent in 2015 Iran has to note a decrease from 2015 to 2020 57 percent.

Another impact the efforts had on is the school expectancy rate for women. From 1970 with about 4 years, it rose to 15 years in 2017. The school expectancy includes the years of received education from primary to tertiary education.

Despite all these overall more positive effects, there are still major differences between boys and girls. The school dropout rate of in some cities is for example for girls twice as high as for boys. This often follows in child marriage since these girls have no future in any profession and to reduce the financial burden that these girls bring with them the families marry them with often clearly older men. So, child marriage in Iran doesn't always have traditional reasons but as well is caused by financial problems of families.

Today, there is still laws and institutional discrimination by the government. The Iranian government signed the A-4 Right to Education Framework which is supposed to ensure accessible education. But still, the legal age for boys is 15 and for girls 9. This results in girls who drop out of school way to early and won't receive adequate education. Furthermore, the legal age in Iran infringes the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" which sets the legal age to 18. Furthermore, Iran has one of the shortest compulsory educations worldwide with 5 years.

The schools in Iran are separated between boys and girls which allows a segregation of the curriculum. The girls get mostly taught about art and social sciences which hardens the believe they underlie boys in physical and cognitive strength. Boys mostly get taught in natural sciences, math and sports. This not only worsens the education for boys and girls but establishes a gender hierarchy.

Another just recent limitation for women is the exclusion of receiving education if they won't comply to wearing a hijab. This rule is supposed to provoke a positive and constructive discourse among students towards the Islamic culture and positive attitude towards the culture chastity and the hijab amongst students.

In addition, just recently the girls in Iran have been poisoned by noxious gas in classrooms for receiving education. This shows again that not only the government has to change itself concerning the education of women but as well the attitude of the population when talking about this topic.

This all shows that there are still major and important problems to face when talking about women's education in Iran.

#### 8. Who needs to handle this issue/ take action?

When looking at the size of this problem and the number of different parties involved, it becomes clear that it is not enough when only a few groups or one group involved tries to change something. Like with most big problems it is also here very important that everyone takes action. It is important that the involved parties try their best in working to the same goal and won't hinder each other when acting. In this case the most important parties involved are the government/Taliban and the population, of in this case Afghanistan and Iran. Like previously described these groups are both partially responsible for the problematic state of women's education in Afghanistan and Iran but as well often all around the world.