



ISSUE BRIEF

# The Costs of Inaction on Girls' Education and Women's Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan

## Executive summary

Beneath Afghanistan's economic stabilization lie deep vulnerabilities, and they are growing. Continued restrictions on girls' education and women's labour force participation are eroding the country's human capital base at a pace that threatens not only future growth but also the viability of essential social systems within the next decade.

In 2024, an estimated 3.8 million girls aged 7–18 were out of school, including more than 2.6 million adolescent girls. In the past five years, at least 1 million girls have already been directly affected by restrictions on secondary education. If current decrees remain in place, this number will exceed 2 million by 2030. Each year of delay locks in another cohort of girls who will never enter the skilled labour force.

The economic consequences are significant and compounding. Conservative estimates indicate that restrictions on women's education and labour force participation are costing Afghanistan at least AFN 5.3 billion (US\$84 million) annually – approximately 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product in 2023. These losses accumulate over time, lowering the country's future growth trajectory and undermining prospects for sustained recovery.

Beyond macro-economic loss, the most immediate risk lies in the erosion of education and health systems. Without the entry of young women into the skilled labour force, these sectors face growing workforce shortages into the future that will directly affect service access for women and children. The resulting deterioration in maternal and child health outcomes will introduce intergenerational costs that extend well beyond the current crisis.

This issue brief argues that inaction is not neutral. It is an active choice that accelerates structural decline and exclusion. Conversely, safeguarding girls' education and women's labour force participation represents a strategic investment in preventing long-term economic and social collapse, even within Afghanistan's constrained operating environment.

## KEY FINDINGS

- ✔ Afghanistan remains extremely fragile, with droughts, earthquakes and economic shocks affecting large segments of the population in recent years. An estimated 21.9 million people, around 45 per cent of the population, are projected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2026,<sup>1</sup> nearly 8 million of whom are children.<sup>2</sup> More than 3 million people remain internally displaced, and recent returnees from Iran and Pakistan have further compounded pressures on services.
- ✔ After the country experienced negative real gross domestic product (GDP) growth between 2020 and 2022, economic growth turned positive in 2023 and was projected to remain positive through 2026 and 2027 before the Iran crisis unfolded. Inflation has declined since its peak in 2022, and domestic revenue mobilization has improved, reaching 15.5 per cent of GDP in 2024 and projected to rise further. These trends indicate a fragile economic turnaround that could yield positive dividends if sustained.
- ✔ Of the estimated 6.27 million girls aged 7–18 years of age, approximately 61 per cent (3.8 million) were not attending school in 2024. Among adolescent girls aged 13–18 of age, at least 2.6 million were out of school, with around 1 million barred directly as a result of restrictions on post-primary education by the de-facto authorities (DFA) in Afghanistan. Each additional year of the ban on girls' education adds approximately 250,000 more girls to this impacted cohort, implying that over 2 million girls will be directly impacted by 2030.
- ✔ This study finds that the number of qualified women entering teaching and health care, the two sectors in which women are both permitted and are needed to work, is rapidly declining. These sectors could lose up to 20,000 skilled teachers and 5,400 skilled health workers by 2030 (9,600 health workers by 2035), equivalent to roughly one-quarter of the 2021 workforce, aggravating already unfavourable female-to-population service ratios.
- ✔ This study finds that, despite historically low female labour force participation, the restrictions on girls' secondary education and women's labour force participation will cost the Afghan economy an estimated minimum of AFN 5.3 billion (US\$84 million) per year in the long run, equivalent to around 0.5 per cent of GDP in 2023. These losses compound over time.
- ✔ Analysis of Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2022–2023 data shows a strong association between mothers' education and child health outcomes, including on vaccination coverage, stunting and birthweight. Declining female education levels are therefore projected to worsen health outcomes for women and children.

## Recommendations

- 1.** The DFA in Afghanistan should lift the ban on girls' secondary and tertiary education. Each year of delay (a) increases the share of uneducated women and contributes to US\$84 million in annual GDP losses, equivalent to 20 per cent of annual economic growth; (b) could increase stunting in children aged 0–59 months (under five years). Our estimate indicates stunting in children under five has increased from 44.7 per cent to 45.6 per cent, affecting an additional 10,000 children; and (c) potentially results in low vaccination coverage and a decline in antenatal care and assisted delivery for pregnant women.
- 2.** Donors and partners should sustain investment in primary education both as a critical pathway towards human capital development and as proof of the positive impact, for girls, of an inclusive learning environment.
- 3.** The DFA should safeguard skills training and allow women to participate in the labour market. This action could add 0.5 percentage points to growth annually, with further gains if education and employment opportunities for women expand.

## 1. Introduction

The change of political leadership in Afghanistan in August 2021 triggered a new decree by the de-facto authorities (DFA), which suspended girls' attendance in school beyond the primary level. Women's participation in the labour force has also been severely constrained, even for those with higher levels of education. Women are not permitted to hold managerial positions, and those who are allowed to work are required to do so without interaction with male colleagues.

Teaching, health care services and law enforcement are the only sectors in which women with higher levels of education and training are currently allowed to participate more freely. The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) Law, introduced in August 2024, formalized these existing restrictions and introduced additional, more restrictive, measures for women. These measures have further undermined women's ability to access public spaces and to participate in social, economic and community life.<sup>3</sup>

During the 2022–2023 academic year, the first since the takeover by the DFA, it was estimated that more than half (approximately 58 per cent) of girls aged 7–18 years in Afghanistan were out of school, representing one of the lowest female enrolment rates globally. Female labour force participation stood at 16.5 per cent in 2020, with an employment-to-population ratio of 11.2 per cent. More than half (56 per cent) of women in the labour force were classified as contributing family workers, primarily assisting with household farming or non-farm enterprise activities, while only 1.6 per cent of women occupied managerial positions.<sup>4</sup>

UNICEF estimates produced in 2023 showed that the Afghan economy could lose the equivalent of up to 12.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) of 2022 if the decrees on girls' education and women's labour force participation remained in place through 2030. Conversely, if the decrees were reversed and additional measures undertaken to improve girls' participation in school and women's participation in the labour force, the economy could gain up to 35 per cent of GDP (relative to 2022 levels) over the working lifetime of women who would otherwise be affected by the ban.<sup>5</sup>

At comparable levels of education, women's average monthly incomes were approximately one-third of those earned by men, highlighting persistent gender inequalities in the labour market. Social sectors are expected to be among the most affected, given projected losses of skilled female professionals in teaching and health care, further worsening already unfavourable ratios observed in 2022. The decrees are also projected to have negative effects on maternal and child health via projected increases in births among adolescents and women with lower education.<sup>6</sup>

This brief provides an updated analysis of the evolving situation more than four years after the enforcement of the decrees. It examines the broader socio-economic context in Afghanistan, and follows this with an assessment of impacts on schooling; women's labour force participation, particularly in the critical sectors of teaching and health care; maternal and child health outcomes; and long-term economic effects. The brief concludes with a set of recommendations.

## 2. Data sources and methods

Data used for this study are drawn from a variety of sources, including the World Population Prospects (2024 revision), the World Bank World Development Indicators database, International Labour Organization (ILO) country statistics, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics (UIS) database, the Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook of 2020 and 2025 and the Afghanistan Education Census by UNICEF (2019, 2022 and 2025 [unpublished]). Where necessary, the authors undertake imputations, aggregations and projections, based on defined assumptions. The methods applied for this analysis are described in the relevant sections of the brief.

## 3. Socio-economic context

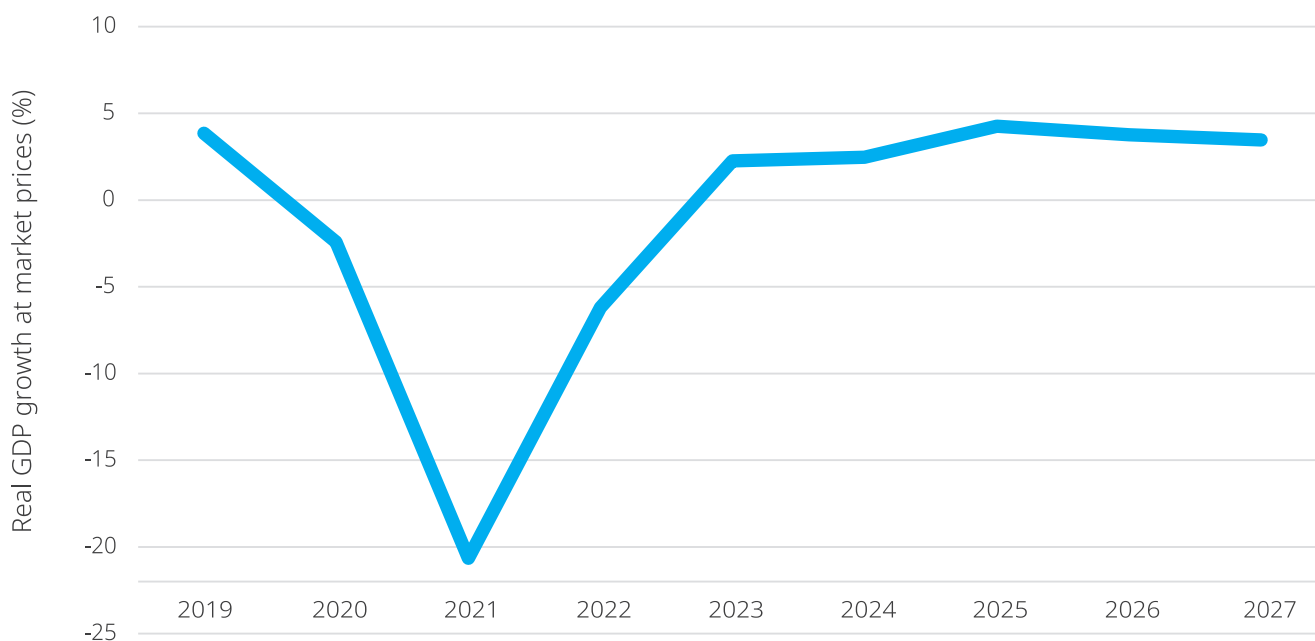
Afghanistan has experienced several shocks and compounding crises since the takeover by the DFA on 15 August 2021. Prolonged droughts have been exacerbated by increasing irregular rainfall patterns and reduced snow cover. The La Niña phenomenon in early 2025 resulted in reduced snowfall and rainfall, alongside higher temperatures. These compounding climate crises have severely disrupted the country's largely rain-fed agricultural activities, threatening food security for a large share of the population.<sup>7</sup> Multiple earthquakes in 2022 and 2025 resulted in deaths, injuries and displacements, further exposing the country's underlying natural fragilities.

Another major socio-economic stressor has been the return of migrants from Iran and Pakistan. Operational data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration indicate that 2,862,900 people returned to Afghanistan in 2025 (last updated 20 December 2025), including approximately 1,857,000 from Iran and 963,300 from Pakistan. A large share of the returnees are of school-going age, with about 42 per cent of those returning in 2025 under the age of 15 and 62 per cent under the age of 25.<sup>8</sup> Cumulatively, more than 5.4 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries, primarily Pakistan and Iran, since October 2023, some of them as a result of forced deportations rather than voluntary returns.<sup>9</sup> Recent estimates by the World Bank indicate that population growth, when adjusted for returnees from Iran and Pakistan, will be approximately 8.6 per cent, representing a substantial increase in demand for social services.<sup>10</sup>

For 2026, an estimated 21.9 million people, approximately 45 per cent of Afghanistan’s population, are projected to be in need of humanitarian assistance. About 17.4 million of those in need of humanitarian assistance are facing acute food insecurity, and more than 3.5 million of them are internally displaced. About 8 million of the people in need are children, of whom around 3.5 million are estimated to be acutely malnourished.<sup>11</sup>

Amid these crises, the country experienced negative real economic growth between 2021 and 2022. Real GDP growth rate was -20.7 per cent in 2021 and -6.2 per cent in 2022. Since then, there has been some economic turnaround, with the country recording three consecutive years of positive real GDP growth. Projections for 2026 and 2027 prior to the Middle East conflict indicated a positive outlook, with real GDP growth rates of 3.8 and 3.5 per cent, respectively<sup>12</sup> (see Figure 1). The high inflation experienced between 2022 and 2023 has also eased since 2024, paving the way for more stable prices for the population. Sustaining these gains would provide much-needed relief.

**Figure 1: Trend in real GDP growth in Afghanistan, 2018–2027**



Source: World Bank, 'Afghanistan Development Update', November 2025. Forecasts for 2026 and 2027 are taken from the January 2026 edition of the World Bank Global Economic Prospects.

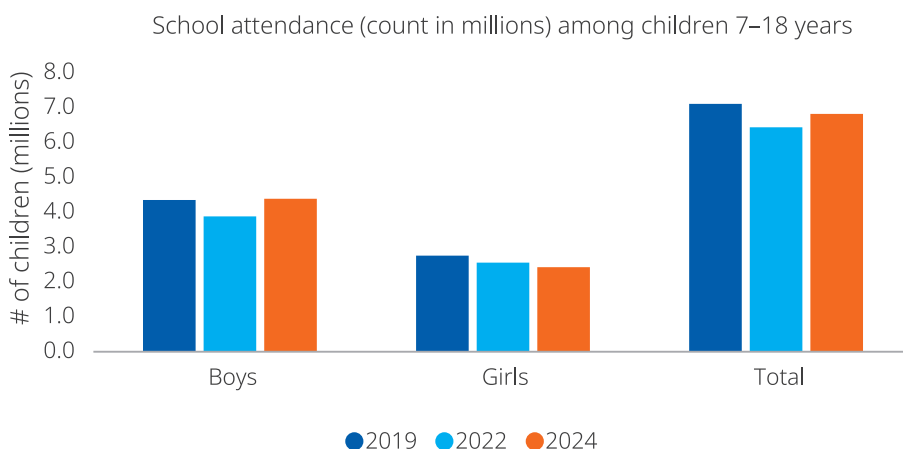
Since the return of the DFA, donors have recalibrated their assistance strategies by discontinuing most development projects and technical support, while continuing to provide humanitarian aid and funding for basic services. In 2025, the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs-led humanitarian appeal required US\$2.42 billion to provide humanitarian assistance to 16.8 million people with a reprioritized budget of US\$1.62 billion. However, available evidence indicates that only US\$989.4 million, approximately 41 per cent of the original appeal, was realized.<sup>13</sup> The return of migrants is also expected to have a significant impact on remittances. In 2023, remittance inflows stood at 17.7 per cent of Afghanistan’s GDP; projections indicate a decline to 12.9 per cent of GDP in 2025<sup>14</sup> and a further decline in 2026 is highly likely given the number of additional returnees in 2025. This socio-economic context underscores Afghanistan’s fragile situation and the need for sustained international support, both to address immediate humanitarian needs and to support the economic growth on which long-term well-being depends.

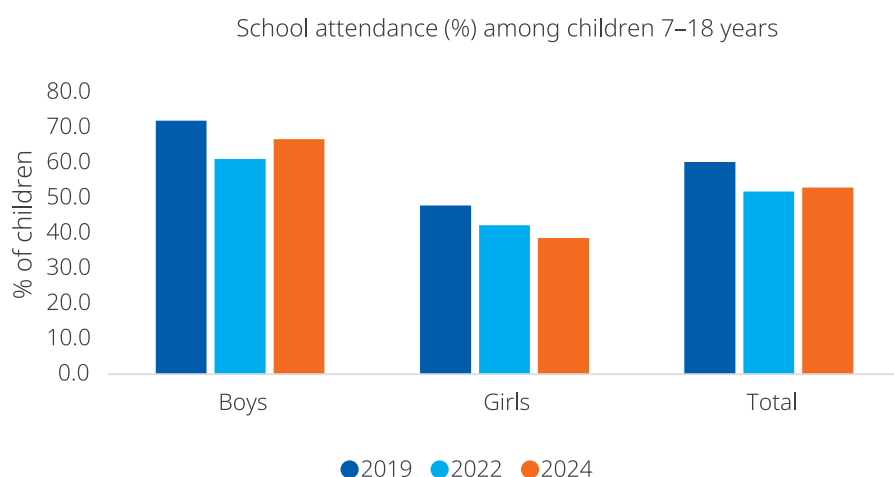
## 4. DFA decrees and schooling

The number of boys and girls attending primary and secondary education in Afghanistan in 2019, 2022 and 2024 is shown below (see Figure 2). Data for these charts come from various rounds of the Afghanistan Education Census conducted by UNICEF and the de-facto Ministry of Education. The chart on the left presents absolute numbers whereas the chart on the right shows attendance as percentages using the age group of 7–18 years, the typical age for children enrolled in Grades 1 to 12.

In 2019, there were approximately 11.8 million people aged between 7 and 18 years, comprising 6.05 million boys and 5.75 million girls. Of this total, 4.4 million boys and 2.75 million girls were attending school, representing gross attendance rates of 72 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively. The gross attendance rate for boys declined to 61 per cent in 2022 but recovered partially to 67 per cent in 2024. For girls, however, gross attendance declined to 42 per cent in 2022 and further decreased to 39 per cent in 2024. This implies that, in 2024, approximately 61 per cent of the estimated 6.27 million girls were out of school, equivalent to about 3.8 million girls in total.

**Figure 2: School attendance by boys and girls ages 7–18 in Afghanistan, 2019, 2022 and 2024**





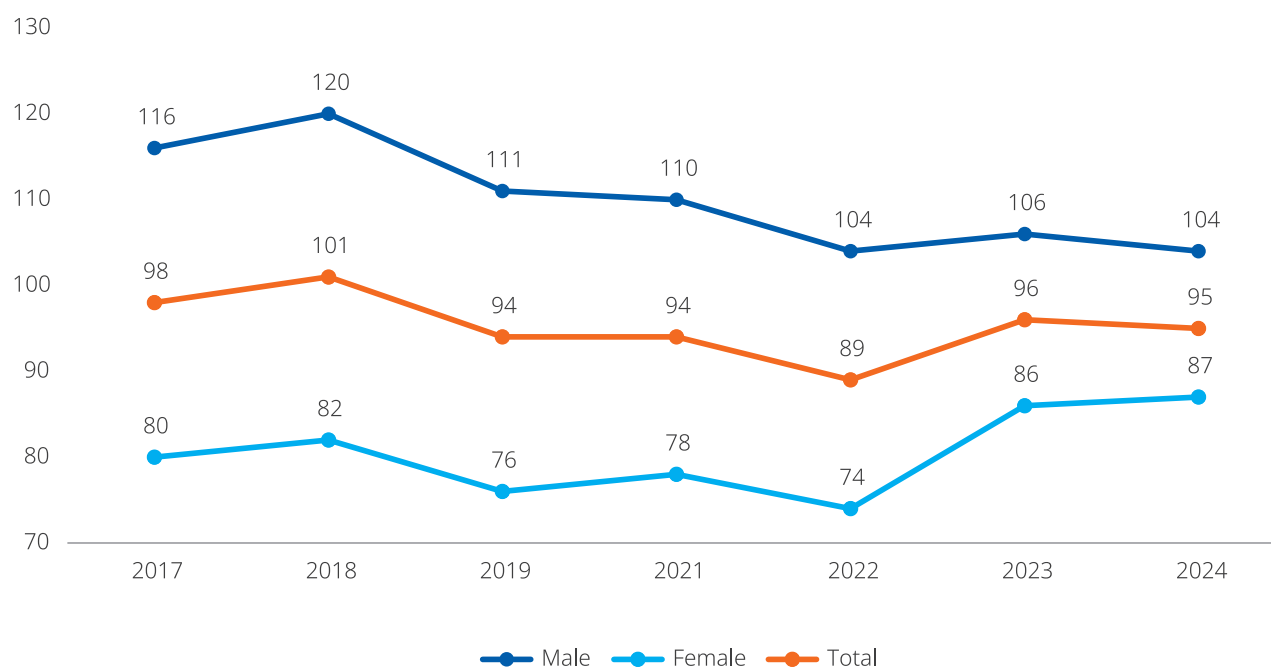
Source: Afghanistan Education Census for various years; World Population Prospects 2024.

The population of girls aged 13–18 years was estimated at 2.9 million in 2024, and only those still enrolled in primary school were still attending. For Grades 7 and above, attendance among girls was zero, in accordance with the existing decrees. In the 2022 and 2024 academic years, approximately 275,000 girls were enrolled in Grade 6. In 2019, about 90 per cent of girls completing Grade 6 progressed to Grade 7. Applying this same progression rate implies that approximately 250,000 girls have missed the transition to secondary education each year.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that about 1 million girls have already been directly affected by the decrees, and that each additional year the decrees remain in place will add a further 250,000 more to this total. By 2030, an estimated 2 million girls will have been directly impacted. The large share of girls not in education, employment or training is an economic drain with potential negative effects on resilience (see Annex 1).

Gross school attendance for boys in 2024 is lower than the observed level in 2019, which suggests there may be some indirect effect on boys' school attendance associated with girls' exclusion from secondary school. This could happen due to some schools closing because the boys alone are not enough to sustain the school, or families may become less interested in education overall. While additional data would be required to confirm this relationship, the plausibility of negative unintended consequences for boys' school attendance should be a source of concern.

It is worth noting that gross enrolment rates (GER) in primary education have increased for girls since 2022, resulting in an increase in the overall GER for the total population (see Figure 3). For girls, the GER increased from 74 per cent in 2022 to 87 per cent in 2024, representing a 13-percentage point increase. For boys, the GER for 2024 remained the same as in 2022 (104 per cent), despite an increase observed in 2023. Overall, the total GER rose from 89 per cent in 2022 to 95 per cent in 2024, a 6-percentage point increase. This progress demonstrates that improvements in enrolment are possible and that reversing the decrees could pave the way for similar gains in GER for girls at the secondary level and beyond.

**Figure 3: Gross enrolment rates for primary education, national, by sex, 2017–2024**



Source: UNESCO and UNICEF, 'Afghanistan Education Situation Report 2025', 2025.

Analysis conducted by UNESCO and UNICEF in 2024 showed that more than 100,000 Afghan women were unable to resume university studies in 2021, implying a risk of having no replacements for about 600,000 skilled women who are expected to exit the workforce over the next 35 years.<sup>16</sup> While part of this gap may be offset by recent skilled returnees from Iran and Pakistan, the overall trend does not bode well in the long term. The UNESCO study further indicates that 40 out of the 129 universities in Afghanistan are at risk of closure owing to declines in total revenue and reductions in student and teacher numbers, particularly among female students and teachers.<sup>17</sup>

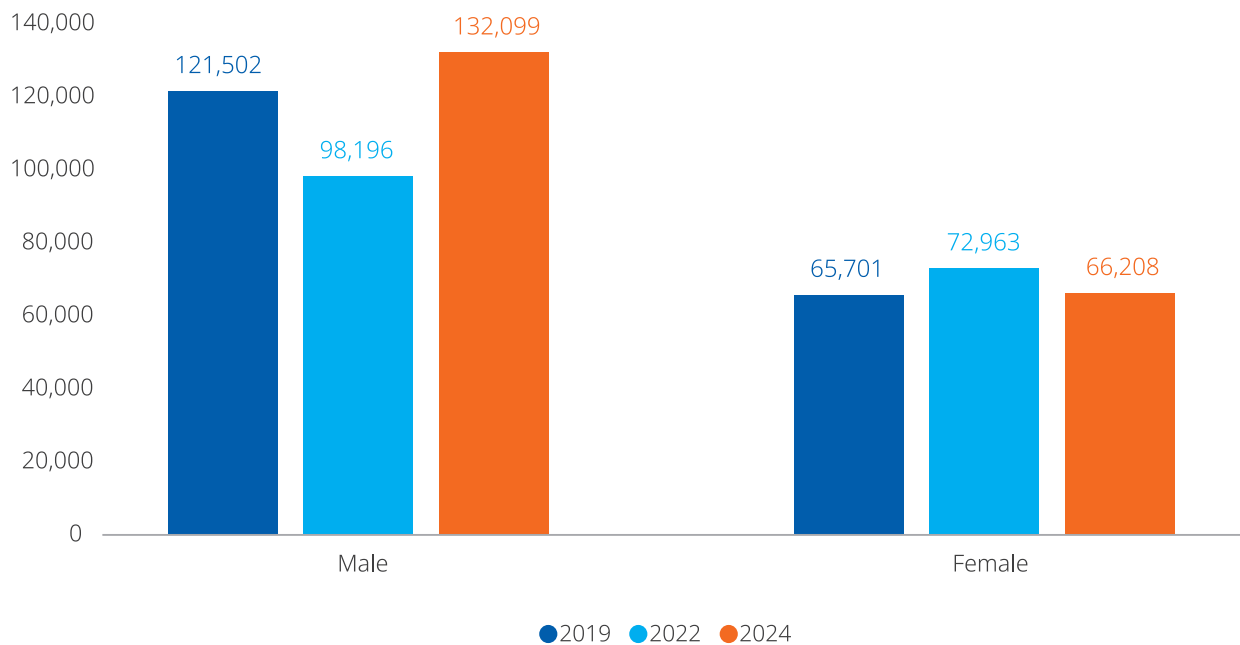
## 5. Women labour force for teaching and health care

Two of the three critical sectors in which educated women are needed and allowed to participate in the labour force are teaching and health care services. Female health care workers are required to attend to female patients, and female teachers are preferred for girls in gender-disaggregated schools whenever possible. Data from various sources show that the number of female workers in these sectors is declining. For example, education census data indicate that the total number of female teachers in general basic education declined from 72,963 in 2022 to 66,208 in 2024 (see Figure 4). Although the number of male teachers has increased by more than enough to offset the decline in female teachers, this does not address the deterioration in the ratio of female teachers to female students.

The two sectors employed approximately 81,000 females in 2020, according to the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) 2020 statistical yearbook. Without continued training and replenishment, this study finds that these two sectors could lose up to 25,400

skilled workers (20,000 in the education sector and 5,400 in the health sector) by 2030 through retirements and brain drain. This would further worsen already unfavourable ratios of female professionals to the female population and severely undermine health care for females.

**Figure 4: Number of teachers in general basic education, Afghanistan, 2019, 2022 and 2024**



Source: Afghanistan education censuses for various years.

## 6. Effect on maternal and child health

The ban on schooling is expected to affect maternal and child health by increasing the proportion of mothers who have only primary education or no education. Given that mothers with only primary or no education experience poorer maternal and child health outcomes than mothers with secondary or higher education, the increasing share of less educated mothers will have undesirable consequences for maternal and child health. If the decrees remain in place for a prolonged period, all mothers will eventually have only primary education or no education.

For example, data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2022–2023 show that, among children aged 24–35 months, 30.3 per cent of those born to mothers with only pre-primary education or early childhood education (ECE) or no education had received no vaccinations, compared to only 9.6 per cent of those born to mothers with higher education. The overall zero-dose vaccination prevalence was 26.4 per cent. With the increasing proportion of women with primary or no education, this study projects zero-dose vaccination prevalence to increase to 28.6 per cent in 2025.

Similarly, stunting prevalence was 47.6 per cent among children born to mothers with pre-primary education or ECE or no education, compared to 28.4 per cent for children born to mothers with higher education, resulting in an overall stunting prevalence of 44.7 per cent. This stunting prevalence is projected to increase to 45.6 per cent in 2025 as a consequence of the current decrees. These projections do not account for the potential shocks to health service personnel or for the worsening socio-economic context.

## 7. Long-term economic effects

To estimate the economic effects of the decrees, the study utilizes income and labour force participation data for women in Afghanistan based on the Afghanistan Income, Expenditure and Labour Force Survey (IELFS) 2020. The composition of the female labour force by level of education and average monthly incomes is shown below (see Table 1). The survey showed that approximately 44 per cent of women had no education, 25 per cent had primary education and 2.9 per cent had post-secondary education. Average monthly income ranged from AFN 5,454 (US\$71) for women with no education to AFN 9,574 (US\$125) for those with post-secondary education. The weighted average monthly income was estimated at AFN 6,708 (US\$87).<sup>18</sup>

Considering a labour force participation rate of approximately 16.5 per cent across all education levels, the weighted average monthly productivity per woman was estimated at AFN 1,107 (US\$14) for the total population of women in the labour force.

If the current decrees remain in place over the long term, the population of working women will comprise individuals with only primary or no education. Assuming the same real monthly income and labour force participation rates, the weighted average monthly productivity per woman would decline to AFN 1,019 (US\$16). This represents a loss of AFN 88 (US\$1.50) per woman per month at the prevailing exchange rate (March 2026).

The population of women of working age is estimated at approximately 10 million, implying a productivity loss of AFN 880 million per month (US\$14 million), or AFN 10.6 billion per year (US\$168 million). Assuming men are able to directly substitute for approximately 50 per cent of the work that otherwise skilled women would have undertaken, this would still result in an estimated productivity loss of AFN 5.3 billion per year (or US\$84 million). Given that Afghanistan's GDP was approximately US\$17 billion in 2023, this loss is equivalent to about 0.5 per cent of the GDP each year. Reversing the decrees could therefore increase GDP growth by approximately 0.5 percentage points per year in the long-run equilibrium. With a growth rate of 2.5 per cent, a 0.5-percentage point loss is 20 per cent of the potential growth.

The proportion of female staff in the civil service declined from 21 per cent in 2023 to 17.7 per cent in 2025, despite women constituting approximately 49 per cent of the Afghan population.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that the work left undone by skilled women cannot always be readily replaced by skilled men, due to differences in social constraints, experience and access. Women contribute complementary competences that are essential to the effective functioning of the economy. If men are unable to seamlessly compensate for the gap created by the withdrawal of skilled women from the labour force, the resulting

productivity loss could be equivalent to around 1 per cent of Afghanistan’s GDP in 2023 each year. Reversing the decrees and expanding women’s access to education and labour force participation could therefore increase women’s contribution to the economy.

**Table 1: Composition of female labour force by education and mean monthly income, IELFS 2020**

Level of education	Proportion of labour force (%)	Average monthly income (AFN)	Labour force participation rate (%)
<b>Panel A: 2020 observation</b>			
No education	44.2	5,454.68	16.5
Primary	25.0	7,091.09	16.5
Lower-secondary	17.4	7,793.1	16.5
Upper-secondary	10.5	8,483.33	16.5
Post-secondary	2.9	9,574.87	16.5
	Weighted average (working women)	6,708.16	
	Weighted average (all women)	1,106.84	
<b>Panel B: Long-term scenario if decrees remain in place</b>			
No education	44.2	5,454.68	16.5
Primary	55.8	7,091.09	16.5
	Weighted average (working women)	6,367.80	
	Weighted average (all women)	1,018.85	

Source: Authors' computations.

## 8. Conclusion and recommendations

The brief draws the following conclusions and recommendations:

- ✔ The findings point to compounding risks arising from sustained restrictions on girls’ education and women’s labour force participation in Afghanistan.
- ✔ Afghanistan remains extremely fragile, with prolonged droughts, earthquakes and economic contraction affecting a large share of the population. An estimated 21.9 million people, around 45 per cent of the population, are projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2026, nearly 8 million of whom are children. These pressures have been intensified by large-scale forced returns from Iran and Pakistan, further increasing demand for already stretched social services.
- ✔ After the country experienced negative real GDP growth between 2020 and 2022, growth has turned positive since 2023, and inflation has moderated following its peak in 2022. These indicators point to a fragile economic recovery that could yield positive dividends if sustained.

- ✔ However, continued restrictions on girls' education and women's participation in the labour force threaten to undermine this recovery. Of the approximately 6.27 million girls aged 7–18 years, around 61 per cent were not attending school in 2024. Based on pre-ban transition rates, around 250,000 girls per year have been prevented from progressing from primary to secondary education. After four years of enforcement, approximately 1 million girls have already been directly affected, with more than 2 million projected by 2030 if restrictions persist.
- ✔ These losses are no longer only prospective. The erosion of human capital is already constraining service delivery. Teaching and health care, sectors in which female labour is essential, face a shrinking pool of qualified women. Without renewed entry of skilled workers, these sectors could lose up to 25,400 professionals by 2030, directly affecting access to and quality of services for women and children.
- ✔ The economic consequences are material and cumulative. Restricting women to primary or no education reduces average monthly productivity by approximately AFN 88 per woman after accounting for labour force participation. Even assuming partial substitution by men, lost productivity amounts to at least AFN 5.3 billion per year (US\$84 million), equivalent to roughly 0.5 per cent of GDP in 2023. These losses will accumulate for as long as restrictions remain in place and could rise further if substitution is incomplete.
- ✔ Finally, exclusion from education and work carries intergenerational consequences. Rising proportions of less educated mothers are expected to increase risks of low birthweight, under-vaccination and stunting among children, placing additional strain on an already fragile health system and reducing long-term human capital formation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✔ The DFA in Afghanistan should lift the ban on girls' secondary and tertiary education. Each year of delay (a) increases the share of uneducated women and contributes to US\$84 million in annual GDP losses, equivalent to 20 per cent of potential economic growth; (b) potentially increases in stunting in children aged 0–59 months (under five years). Our estimate show that stunting in children under five has increased from 44.7 per cent to 45.6 per cent, affecting an additional 10,000 children; and (c) could lead to low vaccination coverage and a decline in antenatal care and assisted delivery for pregnant women.
- ✔ Donors and partners should sustain investment in primary education both as a critical pathway towards human capital development and as proof of the positive impact, for girls, of an inclusive learning environment.
- ✔ The DFA should safeguard skills training and allow women to participate in the labour market. This action could add 0.5 percentage points to growth annually, with further gains if education and employment opportunities for women expand.

## Annex 1: The NEET cohort as a macro-economic and fragility risk

Young women not in education, employment or training (NEET) represent a growing structural risk to Afghanistan's long-term development trajectory. NEET status captures youth who are neither acquiring skills nor gaining work experience during critical life-cycle years, increasing the likelihood of permanent labour market exclusion.

Recent evidence indicates that nearly eight out of 10 young Afghan women are currently NEET, one of the highest rates globally. In Afghanistan's current context, NEET status is not transitional but likely permanent, given sustained restrictions on girls' education and women's labour market entry.

Large and persistent NEET cohorts reduce future labour supply, depress productivity growth and weaken returns on investments in nutrition, health and basic education. International evidence suggests countries with large NEET populations experience structurally lower growth paths, higher dependency ratios and increased reliance on transfers rather than productive employment.

At the household level, a growing NEET cohort weakens resilience to economic and environmental shocks, increases poverty risk and deepens intergenerational vulnerability. Over time, widespread exclusion from education and work also risks eroding social cohesion and undermining long-term stability.

Addressing the NEET challenge is therefore not only a social priority but a macro-economic and fragility-prevention imperative, reinforcing the need to protect girls' education pathways and women's access to productive opportunities even within constrained operating environments.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> OCHA, 'Afghanistan's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025: A call for action', December 2024.
- <sup>2</sup> OCHA, 'Afghanistan's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026', 2025.
- <sup>3</sup> UNDP, 'Afghanistan Socio-Economic Review. Fragile gains, deepening subsistence insecurity, 2023–2024', April 2025.
- <sup>4</sup> NSIA, 'Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook, 2020', Issue No. 42, April 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> Otchere, Frank, 'The Cost of Inaction on Girls' Education and Women's Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan', Unpublished internal report, 2023.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, 'Annual Report', 2024.
- <sup>8</sup> Gupta, Rhea, et al. 'Afghan Exodus: Regional macroeconomic implications and policy challenges', Working Paper 25/176, IMF, Washington, D.C., 2025, <[www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/wp/2025/english/wpia2025176-source-pdf.pdf](http://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/wp/2025/english/wpia2025176-source-pdf.pdf)>
- <sup>9</sup> Jamal, Arafat, 'Press briefing'. Palais des Nations, Geneva, 13 February 2026, <[www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-seeks-support-solutions-5-4-million-afghans-return-since-late-2023](http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-seeks-support-solutions-5-4-million-afghans-return-since-late-2023)>
- <sup>10</sup> World Bank, 'Afghanistan Development Update: Sustaining returns: challenges and opportunities', November 2025, <<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/ece486358b8822699ada5d12cdb5cd09-0310012025/original/Fall-ADU-November-2025-Final-for-Publication.pdf>>
- <sup>11</sup> OCHA, 'Afghanistan's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025: A call for action', December 2024.
- <sup>12</sup> World Bank, 'Afghanistan Development Update', November 2025.
- <sup>13</sup> OCHA, 'Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025: Response overview (1 January – 30 November 2025)', <[www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-response-overview-1-january-30-november-2025](http://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-response-overview-1-january-30-november-2025)>
- <sup>14</sup> World Bank, 'Afghanistan Development Update', November 2025.
- <sup>15</sup> There were about 250,000 girls in Grade 7 in 2019, which confirms the high plausibility of this estimate.
- <sup>16</sup> UNESCO, 'Costs of Continued Suspension of Women's Access to Higher Education and Work in Afghanistan', 2024, <[https://articles.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/09/01.Costs%20of\\_Suspension\\_of\\_Women\\_Higher\\_Education\\_and\\_Work\\_in\\_Afghanistan\\_brief.pdf](https://articles.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/09/01.Costs%20of_Suspension_of_Women_Higher_Education_and_Work_in_Afghanistan_brief.pdf)>
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 13.
- <sup>18</sup> Based on the average exchange rate of AFN 76.8 to US\$1.
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## Acknowledgements

This brief was authored by Frank Otchere, Social Policy Manager at UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence (UNICEF Innocenti), with support from Nkandu Chilombo, Social Policy Specialist at UNICEF's Afghanistan Country Office. The authors gratefully acknowledge the editorial contributions of Ivan Coursac, Economist and Education Manager at UNICEF's Afghanistan Country Office. The opinions expressed are those of the authors.

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### Published by

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### In partnership with

UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office

### Suggested citation

UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence - Innocenti, 'The Costs of Inaction on Girls' Education and Women's Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan', Issue brief, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, April 2026.

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