



# Good Practices on Gender and GBV Risk Mitigation Integration across the Humanitarian Programme Cycle phases by Education Clusters

## Afghanistan



Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, girls' education has experienced one of its most critical setbacks, depriving 1.5 million Afghan girls of their basic right to education and learning. This Case Study highlights measures taken by the Education Cluster in Afghanistan to ensure continuity of education for girls in the face of overwhelming challenges.

## What is the background?

Girls' education has historically faced numerous challenges in Afghanistan, with deep-rooted social, cultural and religious norms and beliefs and poverty playing a contributing role to girls' restricted access to education. In 1999, only 9,000 girls were enrolled in primary school<sup>1</sup> in the entire country, and not one girl was enrolled at the secondary level. Significant gains in girls' education were realised between 1999 and 2020 resulting in an estimated 3.5 million girls enrolled<sup>2</sup>, a sharp increase from 9,000. Despite these gains, several bottlenecks persisted. The proportion of schools specifically for girls is very low (16%) in a context where gender separation is nearly mandatory. These schools are concentrated in or close to urban areas, whilst rural and hard-to-reach areas remain poorly served. Too few female teachers, long distances to school, and poor or non-existent gender-segregated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities also create barriers to girls' education. Moreover, the schools' closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, heightened military and political instability in 2021, and subsequent restrictive policies resulted in further setbacks in girls' access to education. During the school year 2022–2023, 61% of school-aged girls did not access education (vs 25% of the school-aged boys). This proportion went up to 88% for secondary school-aged girls.<sup>3</sup> The primary access barrier to education was the new ban. There has also been an alarming deterioration in boys' access to quality education and learning in the past 4 years.

Community-Based Education (CBE), is a key strategy utilised by Education Actors in Afghanistan to reach children without access to public schooling due to distance and other barriers. CBE includes Community-Based Classes (CBCs) and Accelerated Learning Programmes/Centres (ALPs/ALCs) and has been a part of Afghanistan's formal education system since 2000. The modality was established under the Ministry of Education (MoE) Provincial/District Education Departments, with qualified teachers, following the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) standards<sup>4</sup>.

August 2021

**The Taliban rose to power in Afghanistan and banned all girls from secondary education**

December 2022

**The Taliban issued a decree banning Afghan women from studying in universities and working for national and international humanitarian NGOs**

June 2023

**INGOs working on Education instructed to hand over all Community-Based Education (CBE) programmes to national NGOs.**

This approach has also proven to be particularly successful in addressing the barriers to education that girls face by bringing the school to their communities. CBE has significantly contributed to an increase in enrolment for girls who would not usually have had the opportunity to attend school.<sup>5</sup> There are an estimated 4,380 ALCs in Afghanistan, where 73% of children enrolled are girls.<sup>6</sup>

1 2018 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Samuel Hall, [Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children – Afghanistan Country Study](#)

2 [Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework](#), February 2022

3 [REACH 2023 Whole-of-Afghanistan Assessment \(WoAA\)](#)

4 CBE uses the same curriculum and academic calendar as the public schools, although exceptions can be made for Education in Emergencies. CBE can extend from Grades 1 to 12, though current implementation focuses primarily on Grades 1–3. The ALP curriculum, designed for over-age children who are too old to enrol at their grade level in public school, covers two grades in 12 months and is intended to provide six grades before enrolment into a public 'hub' school. More details on CBE modalities can be accessed at <https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2019-12/Community%20Based%20Education%20Policy.pdf>

5 CBE has been majorly funded under the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) investment window through the First Emergency Response (FER) and the MYRP

6 [Afghanistan ECW-funded 2018–2021 MYRP](#)

# What approaches were used to mitigate the risk of education loss for girls?

## 1 Advocating for equal and increased access to quality education among girls and boys

Following the ban on girls' secondary education, the Education Cluster increased its efforts to provide safe and equal access to quality primary education among girls and boys in hard-to-reach areas and to support alternative learning modalities for children with access challenges.<sup>7</sup>

- In 2022, the Education Cluster and the Development Partners Group (DPG) facilitated the development of the [Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework](#) (AESTF), responding to both humanitarian imperatives and development priorities. The AESTF provided an analysis of the context and status of the education system, including understanding equity and inclusion challenges (including those related to girls' education) following the Taliban takeover. The document identified three Strategic Goals addressing the challenges around Access, Quality and Sustaining Education systems. CBE was highlighted as a key learning modality, while system strengthening includes increasing the number of qualified women available to teach girls at all levels through targeted training and recruitment in local communities.
- [The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) target included 1,149,198 secondary school girls who were deprived of their right to education. The reason for including the entire caseload of secondary school-aged girls was to draw the attention of the world to the fact that this was a huge problem requiring advocacy from everyone including donors, partners and other governments.

## 2 Prioritising partnerships with Women-Led Organisations (WLOs), national/local actors and communities for decision-making and informing the Education in Emergencies (EiE) response

- The Education Cannot Wait<sup>8</sup> (ECW) Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) 2018–2021 supported the recruitment of female teachers, increasing girls' enrolment and retention in school.
- The Afghan Women's Educational Centre<sup>9</sup> (AWEC) acted as the Gender-Lead Organisation (GLO) for the extended MYRP 2025 development process. The GLO is primarily responsible for ensuring that all MYRP-related interventions – outcomes, outputs, activities, analyses, and monitoring – are gender-transformative.
- The Education Cluster conducted large-scale consultations with its members, including women's groups and Women-Led Organisations (WLOs), to understand and continuously monitor the impact of the ban on girls' education and female aid workers. The Cluster partners were in some instances able to come up with safe alternatives to allow female aid workers to continue supporting the education response, including remote support through Whatsapp and mobile calls or periodic visits to learning spaces based on local arrangements.
- The Education Cluster promotes safe, confidential, child-friendly and gender-responsive feedback mechanisms in CBE classrooms, such as girls-only Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and suggestion boxes with picture-based feedback options. The Cluster partners are continually encouraged to use these options effectively and to find ways to better understand the perspectives of boys and girls.
- The Cluster and the DPG support and invest in the School Management Committees, or *Shuras*<sup>10</sup>, to ensure that relevant stakeholders at the community level participate in key system-sustaining activities. In addition, an approach of mixed or gender-separate Shuras will be explored to ensure engagement with and meaningful participation of women in educational decision-making processes.

7 [Afghanistan Education Cluster Strategy 2022–2023](#)

8 ECW is the United Nations Global Fund for Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises. More information is accessible [here](#)

9 <https://awec.info/>

10 The Shuras have been a long-recognised part of the education landscape in Afghanistan and were overseen by the Directorate of Social Mobilisation and Shuras (DSMS). The School Management Shuras (SMS) have no institutionalised gender quotas and therefore, often do not have women as members, thus limiting their engagement with women and girls and limiting equitable outcomes



### 3 Leveraging in-country Gender and GBV expertise

- The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG) has supported all Clusters, including the Education Cluster, through capacity development on rapid gender analysis. During the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), the GiHA WG worked with the Education Cluster to analyse the impact of the secondary education ban on adolescents and define gender-responsive indicators in the HRP.
- Since December 2022, the GiHA WG has conducted regular assessments on the impact of the [women aid workers' ban](#) on organisations' ability to operate. *Dialogue and engagement with women and girls* (Activity 1) and *Education interventions* (Activity 5) were the two main affected activities in the Education sector. The GiHA WG has also been advocating with donors for flexible funding, especially in Education as one of the main affected sectors.



- Several guiding documents have also been developed to support sectors, including the HPC-endorsed [Minimum Standards for Quality Programming in Afghanistan](#) and [engagement with WLOs and women community volunteers](#).
- The Education Cluster has a strong collaboration with the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) on the referral pathway. However, since August 2021, the GBV AoR interventions have been significantly restricted.

## What are the persisting challenges and gaps?

- There are still many unknowns related to the Education landscape in Afghanistan, which requires a constant change in strategies and approaches.
- The current policy environment is having a negative impact on funding for education. There is a reluctance on the part of the donors to invest when partners are unsure if they will be allowed to implement activities.
- There are still many out-of-school girls (60% of the OOSC) – including internally displaced and returnees, or ethnic and language minorities whose right to education is still not met.
- The ban on female aid workers has significantly affected education programme monitoring, especially engagement with adolescent girls and female education personnel in Grades 1–6. Cluster members must be trained on strategies to safely reach girls with education services, but time, resources and opportunities for capacity development are insufficient.
- While the transfer of Education programmes to national and local NGOs may be seen as advancing the localisation agenda, this unexpected edict did not allow for a properly planned and staggered transfer, supported by institutional and technical capacity development for national/local NGOs, including WLOs, in a context where international organisations deliver 70% of the education response.





## What are the lessons learned so far?

- ▶ When girls' access to education is compromised (for any reason), safe alternative education / learning spaces and opportunities are key and should be tailored to diverse groups of girls. Likewise, negotiating for localised solutions with authorities for developing and maintaining alternative learning modalities for girls is critical for the wider reach and sustainability of the measure.
- ▶ When getting visibly involved in humanitarian decision-making processes may put women, girls and minority groups at risk, finding solutions to safely engaging with Women-Led Organisations (WLOs) in the Cluster is instrumental to quality EiE coordination and response. WLOs' participation and leadership are extremely valuable to the Education Cluster work. If they had not been actively involved in the Cluster, with their critical contribution to the barriers and risk analysis, the strategic planning and response, including the ECW MYRP development, reaching girls with EiE services at a time when they need it most would have been incredibly hard.
- ▶ It is of uttermost importance that the international humanitarian community speaks of a collective voice to keep advocating for girls' education in Afghanistan.

### How can you get more information on these practices?

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Further resources are available:

[Afghanistan Education Cluster project monitoring check list](#)

#### Reference group

