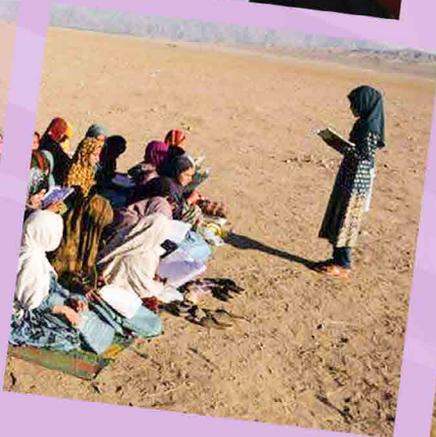


# Field Study on Girls Access to Education

## challenges, opportunities and Situation Analysis



FIELDWORK

**Description:** Field study on Girl's Access to Education, Challenges, opportunities and situation analysis

**Publisher:** Women and legal research foundation

**Donor:** Malala Fund

**Year :** 2019

**Circulation:** 1000

**Publishing:** First

**WCLRF Contact No:**0700649191

**Email:** wclrf@yahoo.com

**Website:** [http:// www.wclrf.org.af](http://www.wclrf.org.af)

**Address:** House # 432, 5th St. Dehnaw-Deh bori, Kabul, Afghanistan.

**Field Study on  
Girls Access to Education**

**challenges, opportunities and  
Situation Analysis**

1398

## About WCLRF

The Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF) was established in March 2002 in Kabul. It was created primarily to respond to the injustices caused by traditional and customary practices against women and children in Afghanistan. WCLRF's work is focused on several long-term objectives, addressing topics that are often considered sensitive in Afghan society, but which bear heavily on the health and welfare of women and girls.

The overall purpose of WCLRF's programming is to empower women and children to claim their legal human rights, particularly the rights to dignity, equality and justice. WCLRF strives to make the voices of women and children heard in all regions of the country, encouraging men to accept the challenge of making communities and homes safe for women and children. Our strategy is to mobilize communities to pre

vent violence and respect rights. WCLRF analyzes the causes of problems faced by women and children by conducting evidence-based research and building advocacy programs that respond to our research findings.

In the communities where WCLRF works, awareness has been raised of the negative impacts of certain customary practices. Our advocacy work is bearing fruit. For instance, after our work on the extravagant costs of weddings and the resulting impact on family economies, in some villages, local authorities have imposed a maximum amount that can be spent on marriages. Our research found that the higher the price for a wedding, the higher the likelihood that there will be violence in the

marriage. WCLRF works with communities and with local authorities – not against them. The outcome of our work is directed at improving communities as a whole, and not just individuals. WCLRF’s activities currently cover a number of provinces, in addition to advocacy work carried out from Kabul.

### **Other Reports Published by WCLRF:**

- Women’s Access to Justice;
- Violence against Women;
- Wife Battering;
- Polygamy;
- Situation of Girl children in Afghanistan;
- Child Marriage;
- Women’s Rights to Inheritance;
- Bad: A Painful Sedative in Afghanistan;
- Access to the Right of Identity Cards and Registration of Births in Afghanistan;
- Extravagant Expenditures on Weddings
- Study on the Impact of Proverbs Against Women in Afghanistan;
- Violence Against Women (report; and documentary film);
- A Look Into the Practice of Child Naming in Afghanistan;
- Waqeyat (“Reality”) - Legal and research magazine published periodically;
- “Jurmana” – An advocacy film about reform of “Bad” in Afghan Society;
- A local song clip reflecting children’s rights;
- “Bad” – A radio drama on this customary practice;
- Research report (physical violence Against Women in Afghanistan)
- Research report of seizing the vote (women political participation

- in Afghanistan);
- Advancing Women's and Girl's Right to Protection Under the EAW Law;
- Women's access to inheritance strategy(Maher, inheritance and property);
- Women's Access to InheritanceMethodology In Islamic Countries ;
- Women's Access to Inheritance and Maher (Two two-minutes spots);
- Research methods in social sinceManual;
- GenderMisterring in national policy Manual;
- women's Economic Empowerment Manual;
- Importance of Maher and inheritance for women's long term empowerment;
- Mullah Importance Nekah Registration in protecting women's in economical Law;
- Preventing Sexual Harassment Against Women and Girl in Afghanistan

For more information please visit [www.wclrf.org.af](http://www.wclrf.org.af)

# content

About WCLRF .....	D
Other Reports Published by WCLRF .....	E
Executive Summary .....	1
<b>Section One- Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Background.....	4
Education system in Afghanistan .....	5
The out of school children .....	6
Girl’s access to education – legal and policy framework.....	6
International Instruments .....	6
National Instruments .....	9
Constitution .....	9
Education law .....	10
Education for all agreement .....	11
The National Education Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021 .....	11
Policy for girls’ education .....	12
The importance of this research .....	12
Methodology .....	13
Data set .....	13
Limitations .....	15
Research Ethics .....	15
<b>Section Two-Research Findings .....</b>	<b>17</b>

Profile of the girls.....	18
The biggest fear: .....	19
Trends of Dropout: .....	20
Main reasons for leaving school: .....	27
Harmful Practices: .....	28
Poverty: .....	29
Distance: .....	30
Hygiene and Water: .....	30
Sexual harassment: .....	31
Security: .....	31
Shortage of female teachers: .....	32
Need to care for other family members: .....	33
Poor quality of education: .....	33
Who is deciding: .....	34
Parents' Education level: .....	34
<b>Section Three-Retention strategies applied .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Role of school administration: .....	38
Role of Civil Society and Donors: .....	38
The National Policy of Girls' Education: .....	39
<b>Section Four-Conclusion and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Conclusion.....	44
Recommendations .....	45

## Executive Summary

Right to education is a fundamental human rights enshrined in both national and international documents. It is not a privilege but an obligation to the states to protect, respect and fulfil it<sup>1</sup>. number of girls going to school worldwide today is more than any other time in history. However, girls are still subject to harmful practices and are faced several barriers in completing their education. The barriers include but are not limited to customary harmful practices, gender discrimination, poverty, conflict and the low quality of educational services<sup>2</sup>. Governments have a duty to address challenges in the systems, legal frameworks and in practice and ensure taking measures to guarantee equal access to education for all.

In Afghanistan, 60% of the children who do not go to school are girls. the statistics suggests that only one in every three girls are currently going to school. Conflict and unrest, poverty, discrimination against girls have been identified as some of the root causes preventing girls from schooling. Rate of literacy among girls is counted as low as 37% compared to 66% among boys. lack of female teachers, distance from schools, lack of boundary walls in the schools, lack of sanitation and access to clean and safe toilets as well as access to running water in the school has been identified as barrier specifically targeting girls' education<sup>3</sup>.

This research was commissioned to understand the causes behind girls;

---

1 <https://www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right>

2 <https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen>

3 <https://borgenproject.org/facts-about-girls-education-in-afghanistan/>

dropout from school particularly in secondary grades. The findings in this research. While the issue of girl's dropout from school is a national concern, the research targeted six provinces (Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Badakhshan and Parwan) for data collection. The findings of this report shows that insecurity and conflict constitutes the major part of the reasons for dropouts. In addition; harmful practices, absence of female teachers, poverty, low quality of education system has been identified as the main obstacles. The research also found that girl's dropouts increased as the get older with the highest being between age 13-15. The report also found that the majority of girls who are currently out of school are eager to return to school.

The report also draws a list of recommendations in order to improve girls; retention in school and prevent dropouts. supporting the school and parent's committee as a mechanism to address challenges faced by girls and their families have been one of the major recommendations in this report. In addition, public awareness raising, advocacy with families, taking measures to increase female teachers, allocating resources to ensure hygiene and sanitation in the schools and refraining from the use of schools for military and political purposes are part of the recommendations identified by this report.

It is expected that this report serve as an advocacy tool in addressing some of the challenges girls are facing in access and retention to schools in Afghanistan.

# Section One

## Background:

Afghanistan has the highest number of school age children- almost one in every five persons. However, not all of them have access to education. This is even more alarming with regards to girl's access to education. As a result, the literacy rate for young women aged 15-24 is only at 18%, compared to 50 percent for boys<sup>4</sup>. Reports by UNICEF and USAID in 2018 announced that nearly half of the school aged children in Afghanistan are out of school. According to another global report Afghanistan has ranked among the two worst countries in Asia along with Pakistan in terms of girls' education<sup>5</sup>.

Causes associated with limited access of girls to education and their failure to complete secondary education vary, but the main reasons mostly reported include; accessibility related challenges due to distance, security related concerns, poverty and harmful traditional practices - specifically child marriage. According to a report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission - AIHRC, 51.6 percent of the parents believe that security challenges are the main reason for their girls not attending school regularly as well as drop outs permanently. A third of girls in Afghanistan marry before age 18. The consequences of child marriage are deeply harmful, and it include girls dropping out or being excluded from education. Moreover, poverty drives many children into paid or informal labor. At least a quarter of Afghan children between ages 5 and 14 work for a living or to help their families. Girls are most likely to work in carpet weaving or tailoring, but a significant number also engage in street work. Work forces children to combine the burdens of a job with education or forces them out of school altogether<sup>6</sup>. In addition, absence of girls only schools mainly in rural areas can present a barrier to girls' access to education. Currently only 16% of the schools

---

4 [http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_68.html](http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_68.html)

5 <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/girls-education-afghanistan-pakistan/>

6 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017

are allocated to girls as the sole students<sup>7</sup>.

The current National Education Strategy is a great step towards recognizing the challenges with regards to girls dropping out from school. But; the strategy frames the issue mainly as an operational problem within the Ministry of Education and expresses that by increasing the number of female teachers and building surrounding walls around girls' schools the challenge can be addressed. However, the strategy is not addressing the issues related to traditional practices, poverty and other factors stopping girls from completing their education.

## **Education system in Afghanistan:**

There are four main types of school for children in Afghanistan: government schools, community-based education programs (commonly referred to as CBEs), religious schools or madrasas, and private schools. Families send children to different types of schools depending on the circumstances of the individual child, or the changing circumstances of the family, sometimes driven by changes in the family's location, the impact of the conflict, and restrictions on girls' education<sup>8</sup>.

Afghanistan's formal education system includes primary schooling (Grade 1–6), lower secondary school (Maktabeh Motevaseteh) (Grade 7–9), upper secondary school (Doreyeh Aali) (Grade 10–12) and various types of vocational schools (teachers' schools and technical schools) under the leadership of the Ministry of Education. Generally, ages of students are 7–12 years for primary, 13–15 years for lower secondary and 16–18 years in upper secondary schools<sup>9</sup>.

---

7 <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>

8 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 41

9 Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 9

## **The out of school children:**

Studies shows that the rate of dropping out from school worldwide was decreasing between years 2000 to 2012; however, the trend is halted in the recent years presenting concerns over achieving targets by 2030<sup>10</sup>. Children are out of school due to several reasons; some may not attend school at all while some others have been forced to stop going to school at certain levels or ages. Global figures indicate that among the high number of children out of school; there are approximately 141 million children of upper secondary school age.

In Afghanistan figures presented in year 2018 suggests that there are 3.5 million out of school children and girls are making 60% of the total<sup>11</sup>. Government statistics indicate that in some provinces, the percentage of students who are girls is as low as 15 percent<sup>12</sup>

## **Girl's access to education – legal and policy framework:**

### **International Instruments**

Education is a human right guaranteed in several international conventions including those that are ratified by Afghanistan. Girls access to education in particular has been mentioned in a number of international conventions; the main ones include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. additionally, Sustainable

---

10 Out of school children report- UNICEF page 8...

11 Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 8

12 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 40

Development Goals - SDGs are providing targets among others for the advancement of access to education.

These international instruments guarantee the right to education and; encourage states to improve systematic access to education and prevent discrimination on any bases including gender.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the most specific and substantive treaty with regard to the normative content and legal obligations of states towards gender equality in education. Article 1 of the treaty defines discrimination against women. Articles 2 and 3 set out measures that states should take to eliminate discrimination. Article 5 requires states to eliminate all gender stereotyping, prejudices and discriminatory practices. Article 7 calls for states to draft and implement policy and laws with gender equality in mind. Article 10 lays out state obligations and establishes acceptable norms, including on equality in access to and quality of education, the reduction of female dropout rates, programs for women and girls who have left school prematurely, and access to educational information on health and family planning. Article 16 prohibits child marriage. Although 189 states have ratified CEDAW, many countries have included reservations, which undermine their commitment to the treaty.

Second, the Convention on the rights of the child explicitly referred to the unconditional rights of children to access quality education. Article 28 of the convention states that: All children have the right to primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children's dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child's human dignity.

---

Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable. Moreover, article 29 outlines the goals of education: Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people. Children have a particular responsibility to respect the rights their parents, and education should aim to develop a respect for the values and culture of their parents. The Convention does not address such issues as school uniforms, dress codes, the singing of the national anthem or prayer in schools. It is up to governments and school officials in each country to determine whether, in the context of their society and existing laws, such matters infringe upon other rights protected by the Convention.

Third, the Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE), the only treaty specific to the field of education, is the most comprehensive treaty covering discrimination in education. CADE prohibits discrimination in all forms, including by gender, and addresses discrimination both in access to and quality of education. Article 2 permits gender-segregated educational institutions provided they have the same quality, provide equivalent content and meet the same standards as gender-integrated institutions.

Forth, Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are often seen as the foundation of the legal right to education. In elaborating on the guarantee of education for all without discrimination in Article 13, the treaty's committee has laid out state practices necessary to provide redress for any discrimination,

---

all of which require close monitoring and disaggregated data to identify patterns of discrimination.

Finally the SDGs; provide a platform for the states around the world to ensure targeted actions are taken for meaningful and sustainable developments<sup>13</sup>. The SDGs includes 17 goals and goal 4 is addressing access to education: to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*<sup>14</sup>. This goal has set out specific targets which includes among others a target to ensure equity in access to education, a target to address recruitment and retention of teachers, specific targets for primary and secondary education and many more<sup>14</sup>.

## National Instruments

The government of Afghanistan recognizes the right to education in various of its national laws and policies. Followings are some of the major ones:

### Constitution:

**Article 17:** “The state shall adopt the necessary measures to foster education at all levels, develop religious teachings, regulate and improve the conditions of mosques, religious schools as well as religious centers.”

**Article 22:** Any kind of discrimination and privilege between the citizens of Afghanistan are prohibited. The citizens of Afghanistan have equal rights and duties before the law

**Article 43:** Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (license), free of charge by the state.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/background/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sdg-goal-4>

The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, and to provide compulsory intermediate level education.

The state is also required to provide the opportunity to teach native languages in the areas where they are spoken.

**Article 44:** The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.

### **Education law:**

**Article 3:** The citizens of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan have equal rights to education without any kind of discrimination.

**Article 4:** (1) The intermediate (basic) education in Afghanistan is compulsory. (2) Pre-school educational level, intermediate (basic) education, secondary, technical professional, vocational, artistic, formal Islamic education, higher education, (Thirteenth and fourteenth grades) teachers' training, literacy and basic practical education in the public educational and training institutions are provided for free.

**Article 19:** The secondary general education level comprises grades ten, eleven and twelve, is provided free in a balanced and equitable manner, in accordance with educational and training standards, considering the number of population and Kochies residing in the area for the graduates of the ninth grades of the intermediate (Basic) educational level.

## Education for all agreement:

This agreement signed in 2005 includes six goals: (1) expand early childhood care and education; (2) provide free and compulsory primary education for all; (3) promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; (4) increase adult literacy; (5) achieve gender parity and gender equality; and (6) improve the quality of education.<sup>15</sup>

## The National Education Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021:

The strategy is covering three core components: (1) quality and relevance; (2) equitable access; and (3) efficient and transparent management.

The data presented in this document clearly indicates disparity in the access of boys and girls over different grades. Disparity gets considerably visible in grade 7-9 of schooling and continues to reflect in later grades.

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Male Students</b>	<b>Female Students</b>
<b>1-6</b>	3,797,303	2,513,107
<b>7-9</b>	1,145,098	675,972
<b>10-12</b>	675,142	330,830
<b>13-14</b>	116,510	51,295

The Strategic plan contain reference to different policies including the equitable access policy. Based on this policy, the Ministry of Education ensures that “the school environment is inclusive, safe and conducive to learning and positive social relations”. The strategy emphasis on initiatives aimed at gender disparity as a priority and highlights the need

<sup>15</sup> Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 60

to include strategies that improve the access to learning and retention of girls in schools and other learning programs. These include plans for: Pilot schemes for the “deployment of female teachers to rural areas”, Pilot schemes for the “establishment of training and dormitory facilities to allow girls and female teachers to continue their education”<sup>16</sup>.

## **Policy for girls’ education:**

This document is being formulated and is currently in the process of finalization. Once finalized; Its key provisions will include: (1) the support of a political dialogue among government bodies; (2) building capacities of school shuras to change communities’ norms towards girls’ education; (3) increasing girls’ enrolment as part of the MoE effort to reach out to the community through CBE and ALCs; (4) reducing child marriage through inter-sectoral collaboration; (5) implementing the Girls Access to Education program (dedicated to the training of female teachers); and (6) increasing efforts to implement water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure in schools.

## **The importance of this research:**

This research initiative is taken to provide evidence and analysis of the underlying factors behind girls dropping out from school, in particular at the secondary level. The research while looking to the operational or internal challenges with regards to girls’ education; will also discuss the systematic challenges associated with society and economy as well as other contributing factors that hampers the girls’ ability to complete their education.

One of the major strategies to ensure challenges with regards to girls’ access to education is to ensure there is accurate and reliable data available. Data and a clear understanding of the causes and consequences

---

<sup>16</sup> National Education Strategic Plan III - 2017 -2021

of girls' dropping out from school can help forming strategies to improve the situation and ensures more girls are able to complete their education.

## **Methodology:**

The research was conducted by Women and Children Legal Research Foundation - WCLRF in 6 provinces of Afghanistan; Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Badakhshan and Parwan. A set of questionnaires were developed as data collection tool which was used by the research team in obtaining information from the field. The questionnaires were used in both one on one interviews as well in focus group discussions.

Moreover; desk review was used to establish an understanding to the background and the context of access to education for girls in Afghanistan. In doing so the recent reports published by credible organizations i.e. Human Rights Watch and UNICEF was extensively reviewed.

The field researchers; identified by WCLRF and were trained rigorously both with regards to the use of data collection tools and moreover the concept of right to education, girls' access to education and barriers to the enjoyment of this right. The research team attended a two days intensive training program in Kabul and also were given time to practice the use of the questionnaires in practical setting to ensure clarity in operationalization of the tools.

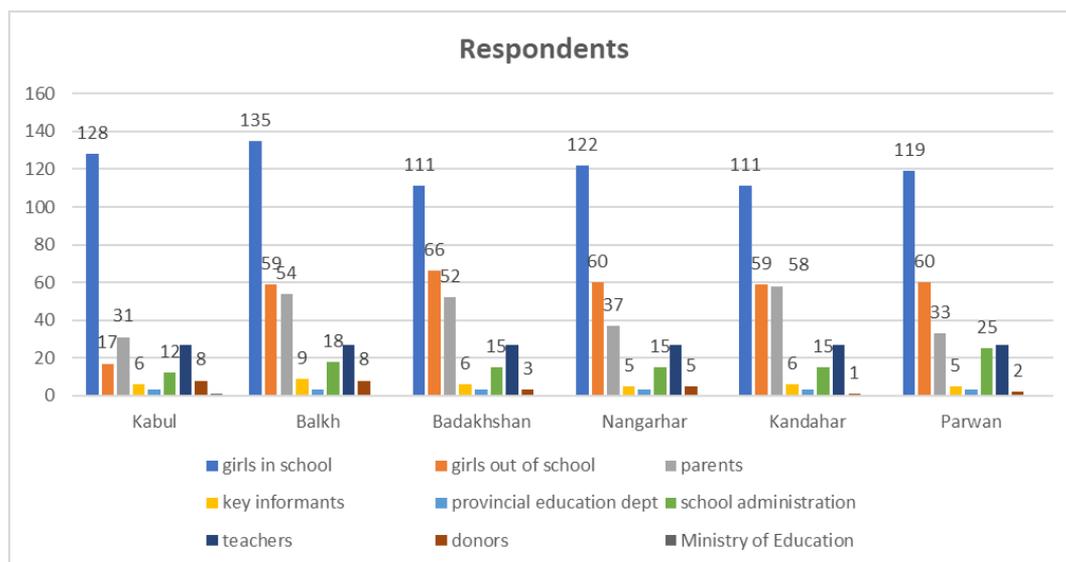
## **Data set:**

In each of the selected provinces 3 locations (the capital and two additional districts) were selected. Locations were selected in coordination with the Ministry of Education, the local officials, including the department of education and Malala Fund partners present in the field. In selection of locations; its accessibility and security were also taken in to

consideration. In each province a maximum of 15 secondary schools run by government were selected.

Province	Kabul	Bada-khshan	Kandahar	Balkh	Nangar-har	Parwan
Districts	Kabul	Faizabad	Kandahar	Balkh	Jalala-bad	Chari- kar
	Bagra-mi	Yaftal	Daman	Charkent	Sur-khroad	Bagram
	Mir Bacha-kot	Argo	Dand	Khulum	Behsod	Sayed Khel

The Participants in the research included the students, teachers, parents, officials of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs, lead national and international NGOs in the sector of education, and District Development Assembly (DDAs). In addition, experts in gender and education issues as well as donors in the education sector were also interviewed in Kabul. The chart below presents the respondents in disaggregated form:



## Limitations:

Data collection phase started as per the plan; however; completion of data collection was delayed severely by the parliamentary election in the provinces. It was challenging to conduct interviews and ensure participation of respondents.

In addition; assassination of the chief police commander in Kandahar province; contributed to unrest in the province and caused further delays in the process of data collection.

There were also unavoidable delays while a joint MOU was signed with the Ministry of Education to carry out the project.

## Research Ethics:

Given the cultural sensitivities around girls in Afghanistan and the engagement of child girls in the collection of the data; the research team was particularly trained on the principles of child protection as well as research ethics throughout the implementation of the project. Some of the main ethical principles that was strictly followed by the team

includes but not limited to the followings:

Do no harm.

- Ask permission/consent of the Participants and help them to make informed decisions about participation in the interviews.
- Ensure Participants and their decisions are respected fully with regard to the amount of information they would like to share.
- Ensure that Participants are given a reasonable amount of time to ask questions and seek clarifications if they need to.
- Respect the autonomy of Participants; they can leave interview before completion if they need to do so.

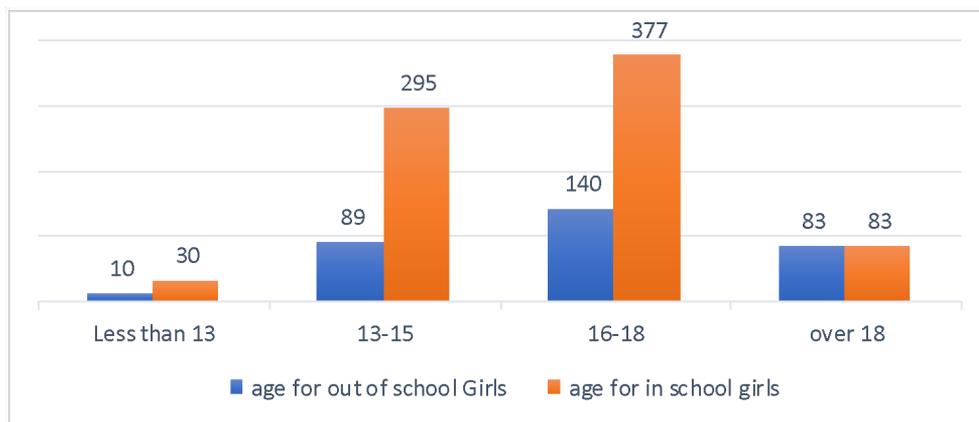
# **Section Two**

## **Research Findings**

## Profile of the girls:

The research team among other respondents; interviewed 322 girls who stopped going to school as well as 726 girls in secondary classes who still continue to go to school. From the total number of out of school girls 16 were recorded as returnees and another 29 were from among internally displaced people in the targeted provinces, while there were 44 Returnees and 61 IDPs among the respondents who are in school.

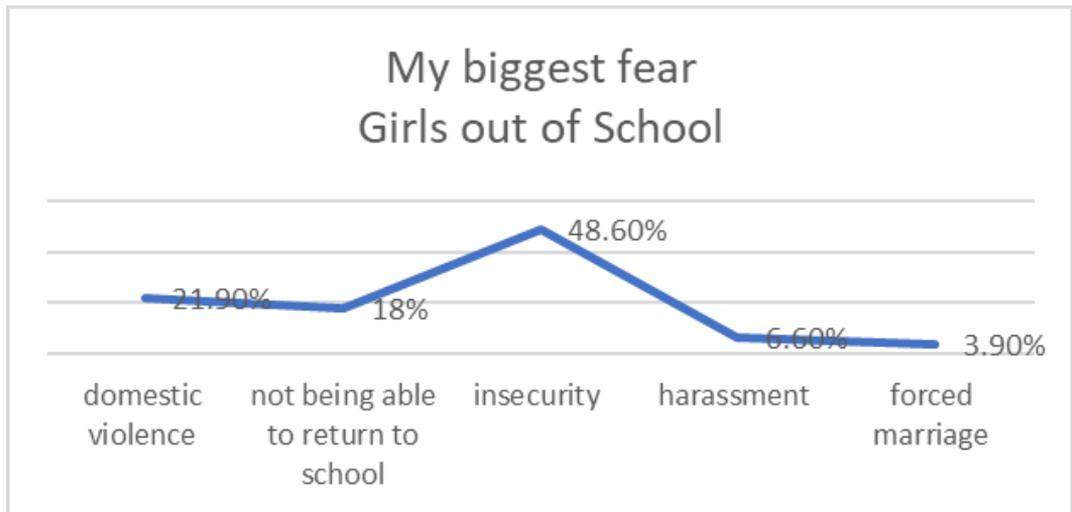
In addition; 8 girls among out of school and another 8 among the in-school girls interviewed were experiencing some kind of disabilities. The girls interviewed are divided in several age groups where the highest number are in groups from 13 – 18 years of age.



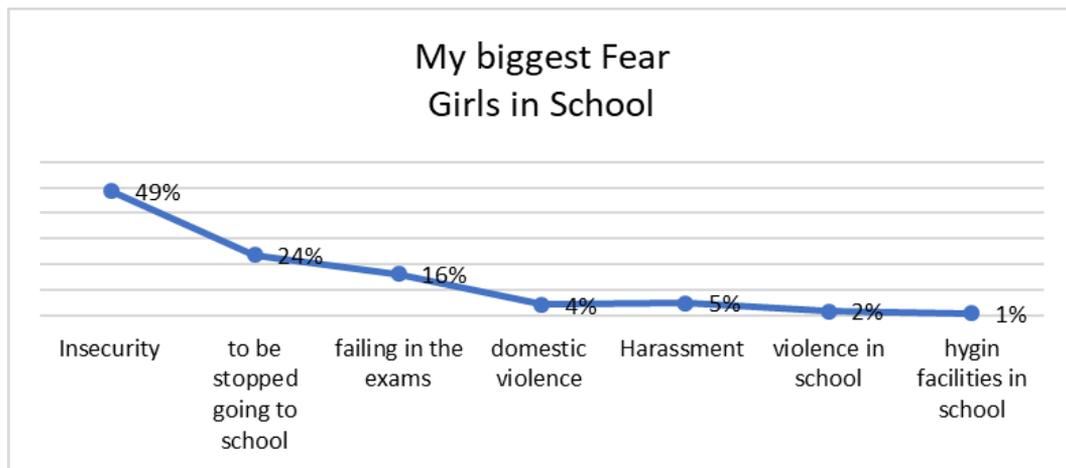
From among the out of school respondents 27 mentioned that they don't have father and another 9 had no mother. Majority of the respondents had both parents alive. Among the in - school group 12 had no mother and 34 had no father.

## The biggest fear:

Described by most of the girls in out of school group was insecurity, war and conflict forming 124 of the respondents followed by domestic violence, not being able to return to school, sexual harassment and forced marriage.



The girls who are still in the school have additional fears. While they continue going to school, they still have fears that maybe one day they will be asked to stop attending classes. In addition, there are other fears some similar to the out - of school group and some different. It should be noted that insecurity harassment and domestic violence are among the most frequently cited fears among both groups. Below is a chart describing those fears listed by the in-school girls:



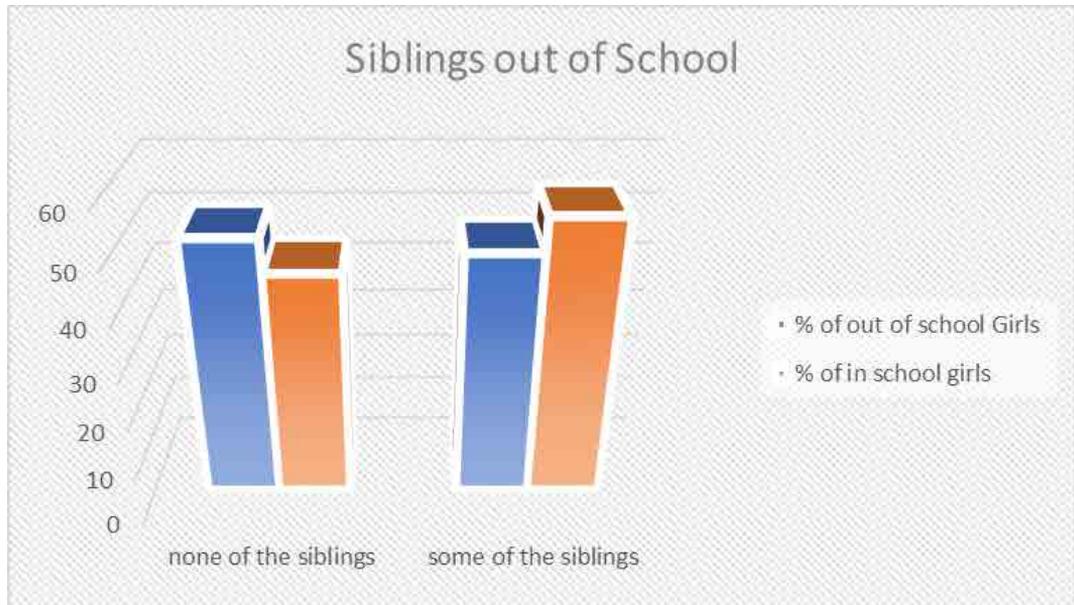
However; most of the girls in the in-school group are optimistic about the possibility of being able to continue education till graduation. In a question asked from this group on the possibility of them being asked to stop going to school? The majority (74.9%) stated that “it is impossible for them to stop going to school”.

In addition; the girls in the in - school group was asked what would be the biggest reason for their family to stop them from going to school and the answer for most of the respondents were that deterioration of security situation can force their families to prevent them from going to school immediately.

### **Trends of Dropout:**

The girls who are dropped out from school are not the only one in their families who are unable to continue education; in most families a trend of drop - out has been noticed. Even the girls who are still in school and are enjoying attending classes have reported having siblings who are out of school now and were not able to complete their education.

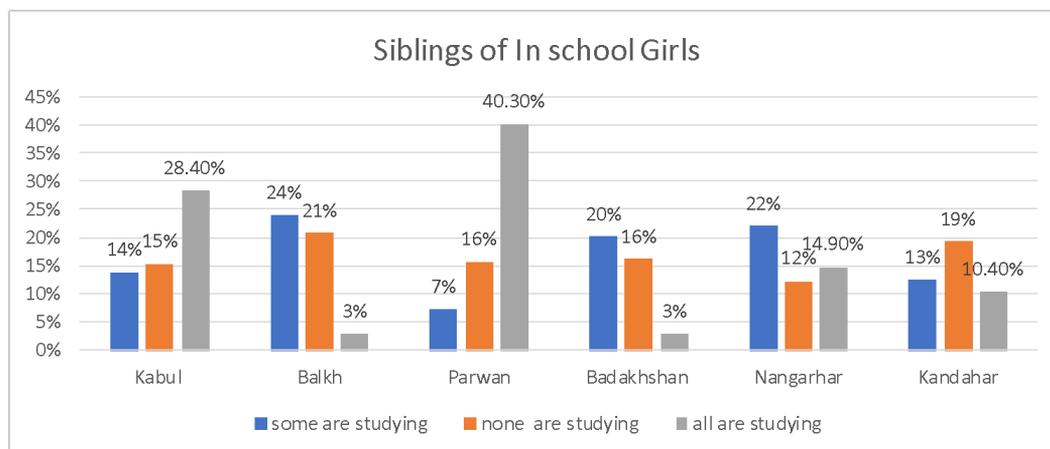
When asked; if they have other siblings who have not completed their education; both groups had some or none of their siblings completed their education.



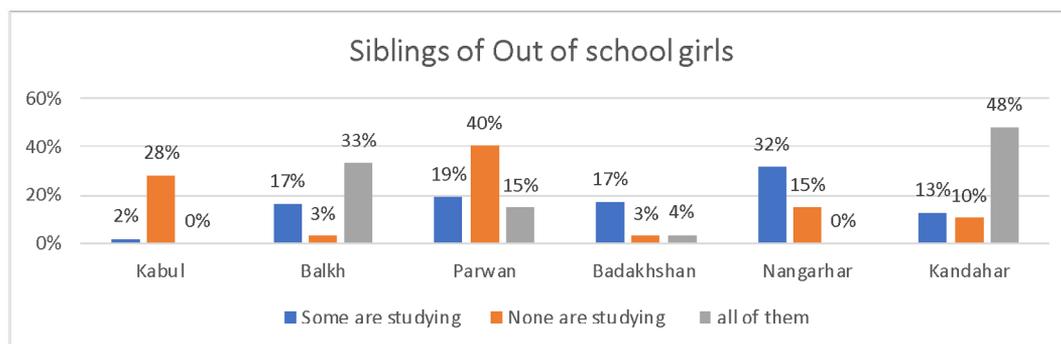
However; as can be seen in the chart; among the out of school girls the percentage of siblings who have the same situation and did not completed their education is higher. At the same time a slightly higher percentage of girls who are still in school suggested that some of their siblings already completed their education. looking in to this however small number of the siblings who were able to finish school; can be considered as a likelihood for the respondents (girls in school) to also be able to complete their education.

In terms of provinces the data suggests that number of siblings who are out of school among school girls were higher in Balkh and Kandahar followed by Parwan and Badakhshan. reasons for this variation was

not part of the data collection tools; however, this can call for further analysis on to these findings.



For the out of school girls the provincial analysis shows that the number of siblings who do not study is higher in Parwan province.



Interviews with parents of the girls out of school also suggests that in their families they have more girls who are not attending school. The categories for non-attendance varied but the large group of respondents 157 out of 355 said that only some of their daughters are going to school

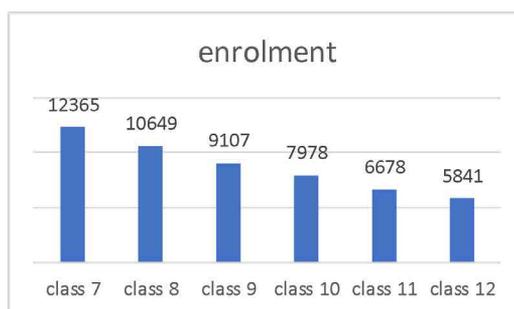
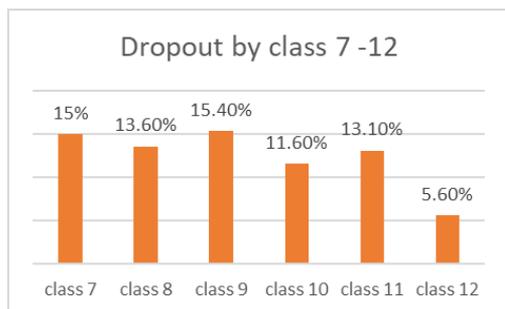
with another 68 persons confirmed that their daughters are asked to leave school and not to continue.

Overall statistics shows that survival rates for girls in education system is lower than boys. A UNICEF report on the issue of out of school children which is centered to the primary and lower secondary students in Afghanistan shows that survival rate to the last grade of primary education is the same for both girls and boys at 84.9 percent; and the trend continue almost when they reach lower secondary. However, in the lower secondary the rate changes slowly and the survival for boys are 94.3% which is slightly higher than the rate for girls which is 90% in the same group<sup>17</sup>. This is consistent with the findings of this research. It actually shows that the rate of survival for girl's decrease as their age increases.

Interviews with the administration of the targeted school's presents alarming numbers in terms of the trends for girls' dropouts. It basically shows that not only there is an average of 10 -15% dropouts in each level/ class girls move in; but there is also a decrease in the number of girls enrolled as they move to higher classes. The total of 12365 girls enrolled in class 7 has reached only 5841 students when they start their 12th grade. This shows a decrease of almost 47% over a period of 5 years. While there might also be some other reasons for the decrease, including moving to a different school or province; the figures are still very concerning.

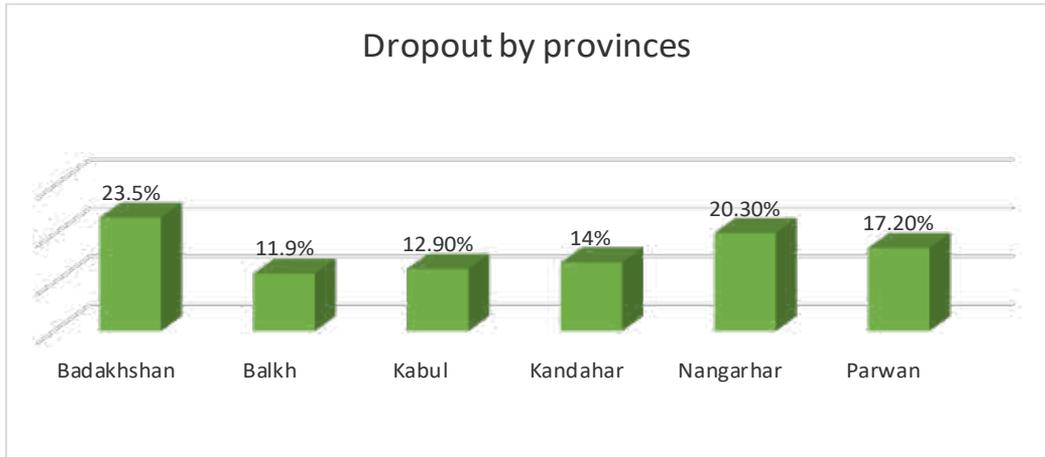
---

<sup>17</sup> Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 31

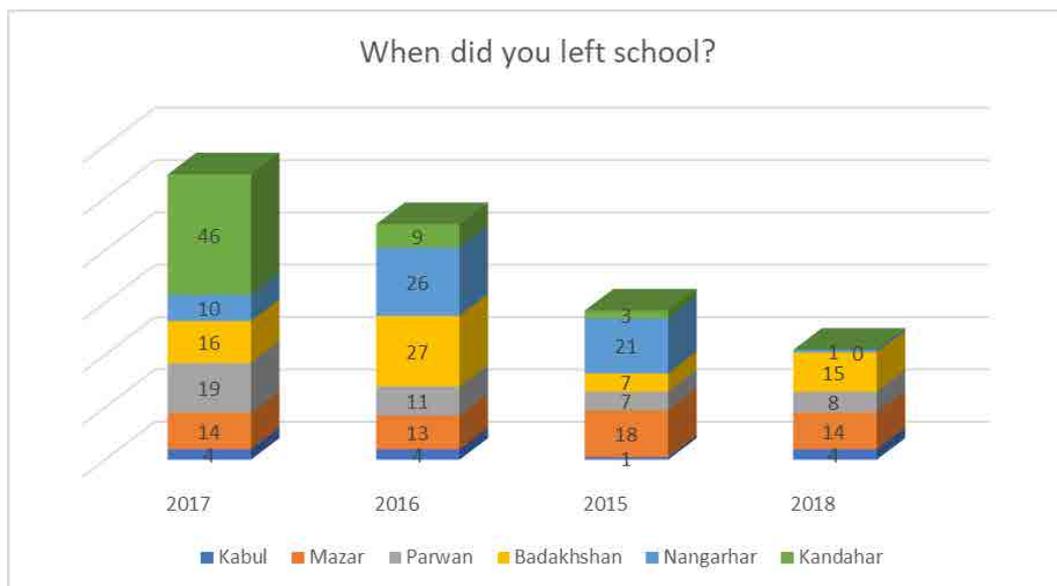


In terms of provinces; Badakhshan has the highest score of dropouts among the targeted provinces, with almost 50% increase compare to other provinces. There are no particular reasons indicated for this large difference. However, it may call for further analysis of the context in this particular province. It should be noted that the trend of dropout in the rest of the provinces are almost at the same rate; yet alarming. Globally only 77% of girl’s complete secondary education, which in most countries is 9 years of schooling. In low income countries, the numbers drop to below 1/3 for lower secondary school<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/misled-opportunities-the-high-cost-of-not-educating-girls>



Out of school group was also asked about the time when they left school. As can be seen in the chart below there is a lot of disparity between the time when the respondents left school and the provinces they belong too. For example, while Kandahar had the high number of girls leaving school in 2017; in the year 2018 zero number of respondents recorded for this particular province. The number of dropouts from schools in Kabul has been almost steady and form the lowest number in all of the years recorded. There is also a decrease in the number of reported dropouts in Nangarhar province based on the interviews conducted. As to the reasons for disparity; there is no specific causes identified by the research team. However, this shows that variety of reasons can cause girls dropout and the challenge is not particular to a specific province or place. The figures presented here suggests that most of the girls dropped out school quit recently and there are still possibilities for them to return to school; should the barriers stopping them from attending is addressed.

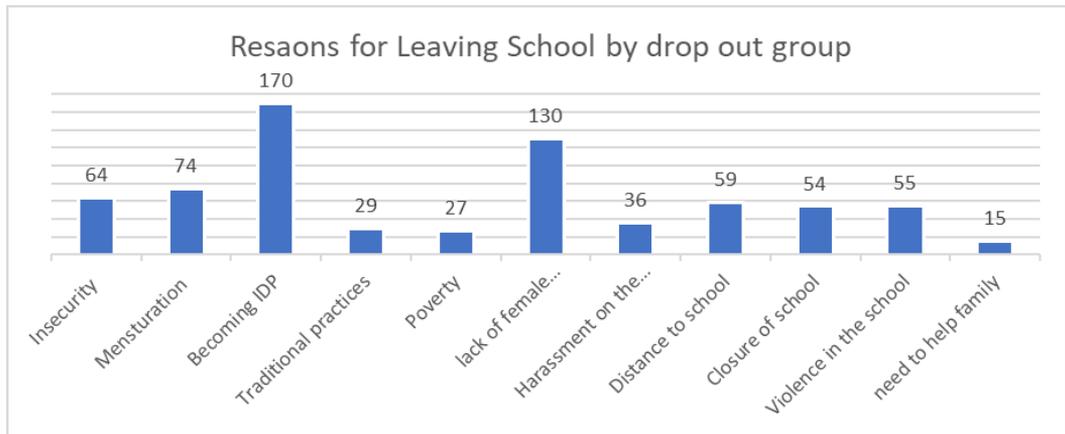


Interviews with parents of out of school girls indicates that the common age of dropouts for girls from school starts usually from 13 years old. At least 59% of the parents mentioned age group 13-15 as the main drop out age and another 26% mentioned age group 15 and above as the drop out age. At least 63% of the school administrators also confirmed age 13 – 15 i.e. grade 7th as the common dropout point for girls. This fact is also confirmed in the interviews by the key informants.

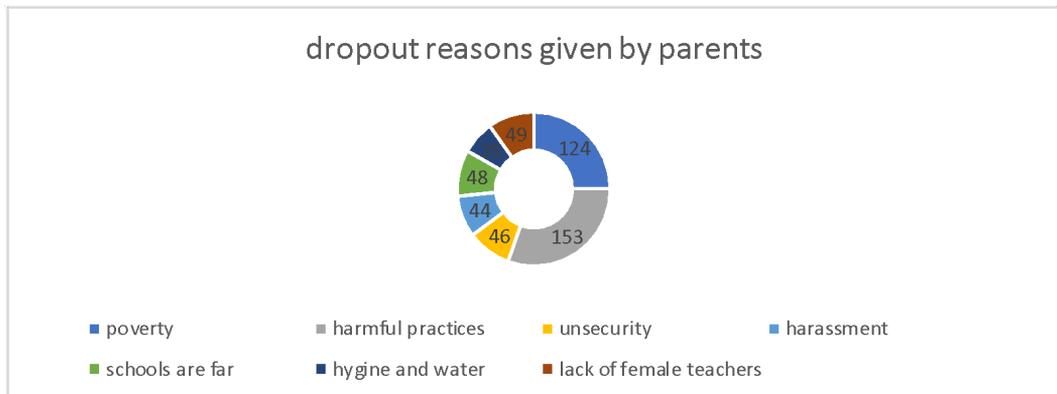
At least 242 of the out of school group interviewed wanted to get back to school. Most of them have dreams of completing their education and moving to university to become lawyers, doctors and teachers. Parents of out of school girls also have a high interest to see their daughters going back to school one day. Corresponding to the reasons for dropout given below; they mostly mentioned that if the security improved, if there were only female teachers and if there were schools build nearby; they would be able to send their daughters back to school.

## Main reasons for leaving school:

There are various reasons for dropouts from school, most of which is already well-known. The reasons or factors contributing to dropouts stated by the girls who are forced out of school are presented in the chart below:



Reasons for dropouts stated by parents' group during the Focus Group Discussion is presenting some of the similar reasons and some different

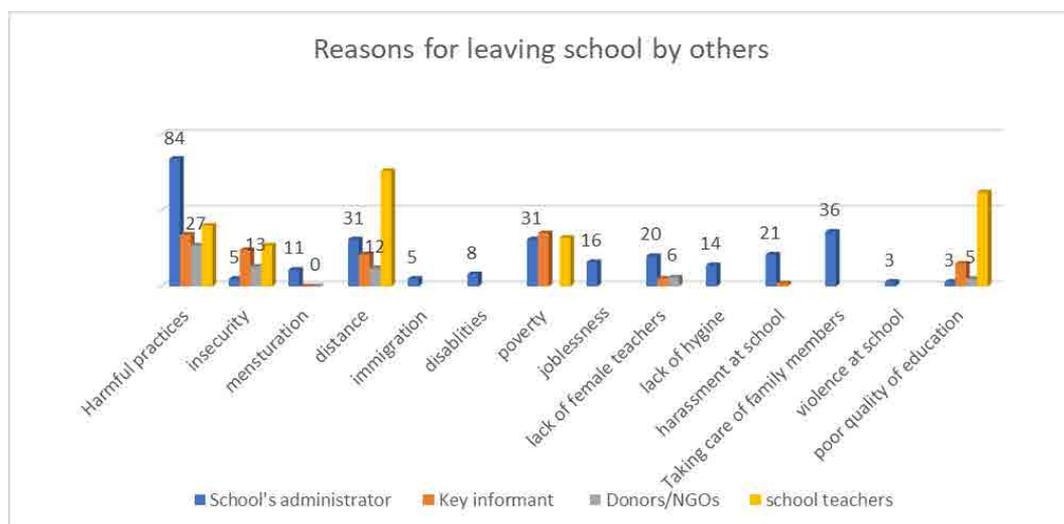


reasons from what was stated by the out of school girls:

Reasons given by out of school girls and the parents group are somehow different in terms of numbers but obviously interlinked. For example,

becoming Internally displaced - IDP is scored high by girls while poverty is identified as the more frequent reason by parents' group. Although this two are different but it can be assumed that becoming IDP affects the economic situation of the families and they become poor thus making the reason for drop outs to be poverty as well as becoming IDP. However; in the data presented by parents' group during Focus Group Discussions poverty and harmful practices are ranked higher than other reasons.

The report also analysed reasons given by other categories of respondents for the drop out. As can be seen in the chart below; statistics for harmful practices is among the highest stated reasons.



## Harmful Practices:

Harmful gender norms including early and forced marriages, son preference, restricting girls' mobility etc. are deeply exist in most of the families in Afghanistan. In some place's education is seen as wholly undesirable or acceptable only for a few years before puberty. In a country where a third of girls marry before age 18, child marriage forces many

girls out of education. Under Afghan law, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 16, or 15 with the permission of the girl’s father or a judge. In practice, the law is rarely enforced, so even earlier marriages occur. The consequences of child marriage are deeply harmful, and they include girls dropping out or being excluded from education. Other harms from child marriage include serious health risks— including death—to girls and their babies due to early pregnancy. Girls who marry as children are also more likely to be victims of domestic violence than women who marry later.<sup>19</sup> There is a lower demand for higher education for girls due to perceptions that their higher education is unnecessary. In some regions, education beyond basic literacy and numeracy is not considered to be required for girls, exacerbated by child marriage as girls transition into lower secondary education around the age of 12<sup>20</sup>. There is no data available on the percentage of girls who marry before the age of 15<sup>21</sup>. Being out of school also puts girls at heightened risk of child marriage. Afghan government data indicates that girls who did not study are three times as likely to marry before age 18 as girls who completed secondary education or higher<sup>22</sup>.

## Poverty:

Poverty is usually cited as the biggest barriers to education and indeed this is the case in Afghanistan. It has a multitude of effects on access to education, from influencing decisions on child marriage to opportunity costs for education. Extreme poverty is usually more common in rural areas than in urban Afghanistan, but almost all families and communities in Afghanistan face some degree of economic hardship<sup>23</sup>. Although

---

19 I won’t be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl’s access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 22

20 Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 43

21 I won’t be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl’s access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 52

22 I won’t be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl’s access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 53

23 Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 46

school is free in Afghanistan, families still face financial barriers in the form of ancillary costs to education. For many poor families in Afghanistan it is not the direct costs of education, but rather indirect costs, such as the costs of school supplies, clothes (uniforms), transport and food that render education unaffordable. According to a report by The World Bank in Afghanistan 62% of non-poor children go to school, but only 48% of poor children do<sup>24</sup>.

## **Distance:**

The charts presented above indicate distance to school as one of the reasons for dropout. According to the Ministry of Education, 41% of government schools in Afghanistan have no buildings.<sup>25</sup> At least 18% of the teachers attending the focus group discussion for this research confirmed distance as a major barrier for girls' access to schools.

## **Hygiene and Water:**

Based on a report by Human Rights Watch; 30% of Afghan government schools lack safe drinking water, and 60% do not have toilets. Girls who have commenced menstruation are particularly affected by poor toilet facilities. Without private gender segregated toilets with running water, they face difficulties managing menstrual hygiene at school and are likely to stay home during menstruation, leading to gaps in their attendance that undermine academic achievement, and increase the risk of them dropping out of school entirely<sup>26</sup>. Based on the findings of the report girls who dropped out of the school has also indicated menstruation as one of the reasons for leaving school. Challenges in

---

24 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 57

25 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 pages 84

26 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 pages 21

access to water and hygiene mentioned by the parents' group also refers to the same problem.

## **Sexual harassment:**

Concerns around harassment both on the way to school and inside the school have always exist, Afghanistan is no exception. In this report; both out of school girls and parents' group mentioned harassment on the way to school as one of the reasons for dropouts. However; no indication of the harassment inside the school was given by the respondents. Families prefer not to send their children to school rather than risk family honor. This is particularly the case for girls, who embody this honor. Findings of a research conducted by Women and Children Legal Research Foundation - WCLRF suggests that 89% of the girls interviewed confirmed presence of sexual harassment in the education sector<sup>27</sup>.

## **Security:**

Deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan has significant impact on the capacity of the Ministry of Education to provide quality education for everyone. Closure of schools was one of the reasons cited frequently by the out of school girls as well as the parents' group for dropouts from school. In addition, the girls who are still in school also are afraid that they will not be able to continue their education if security in their area was worsen. The proximity of front lines has a strong impact on school closure as well as school attendance and enrolment, especially for girls. It is difficult to hire qualified staff in war-torn areas and in AOG-controlled areas<sup>28</sup>. Constant fear for safety results in families not allowing girls to walk to school and migrating to

---

<sup>27</sup> Sexual harassment against women in public places, work place and educational institution in Afghanistan; Page 26

<sup>28</sup> Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 55

urban areas or abroad. The lack of provision of quality education has also been noted as a factor for migration<sup>29</sup>. Children accounted for 28 per cent of all civilian casualties in 2018. Throughout 2018, United Nation Assistance Mission For Afghanistan - UNAMA documented a rise in attacks and threats affecting education – three times as many incidents as in 2017 – mainly due to the Taliban attacking voter registration and polling centres located in schools through the parliamentary elections. UNAMA is also concerned with an emerging trend in 2018 of attacks and threats by Anti-Government Elements, particularly by Daesh/ISKP against education facilities, carried out in reaction to military operations by Afghan and international military forces<sup>30</sup>. When security worsens, one of the first consequences is often girls losing access to education. Families often clamp down first on girls going to school, even while boys continue to attend. Bina, a 35-year-old mother of 10 children, explained why her family fled to Jalalabad in 2011. “We left Bati Kot because the Taliban put acid on girls,” she said. “Seven or eight girls were injured on their way to school in the morning.” She said that the girls were teenagers, and that the attacker was on a motorcycle and had his face covered. After the attack, she said the attackers left a letter in the mosque addressed to the families of the injured girls: “They said they should not go to school, because they are too old.” After the attack, Bina said that about two thirds of the school’s 150 girls had stopped attending.<sup>31</sup>

## **Shortage of female teachers:**

Based on the findings of this report; lack of female teachers has been cited as one of the scored reasons given by out of school girls 18.2% and the parent’s group 9.8% for drop outs. As in most areas in the country

---

29 Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 55

30 Afghanistan, protection of civilians in armed conflict; annual report February 2019

31 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017 page 70

including areas targeted by this research girl are often not allowed to be taught by male teachers. Statistics show that only 32% of teachers and 17% of primary school teachers are women. Four provinces have less than 5% female teachers and 22 % of all districts have no female teachers at all.<sup>32</sup> As of 2014, only a third of teachers were women, mostly in urban centers<sup>33</sup>. Many reports and statements by the MOE also confirm the shortages of female teachers. Moreover, security related concerns limit the chance of the female teachers to reach rural areas.

### **Need to care for other family members:**

This is an interesting finding. Almost all categories of the respondents have mentioned this as a reason for leaving school for girls. In Afghanistan house chores are the sole responsibility of women in the house. In addition, families are big and always have three generations (grandparents, parents, children) living together. The figures here represent that when mothers are not able to take care of the family, including the old and sick members of the family; then they may need for help and it is common that girls should be the one helping moms in the house chores. This may cause some time for the girls to stop going to school in order to provide additional support to mothers in completing the housework.

### **Poor quality of education:**

Among the reasons given for withdrawal a considerable number of respondents; mainly teachers who attended FGDs; identified problems with the quality of education as one of the reasons for dropouts. They mentioned that the limited capacity of the teachers in delivering quality education as well as limited access to educational materials including text books discourages students to attend classes resulting in withdrawal. It is worth noting that this issue may not be particular

---

<sup>32</sup> Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 52

<sup>33</sup> Global initiative on Out-of-school children; All children in school and learning; Afghanistan country study page 65

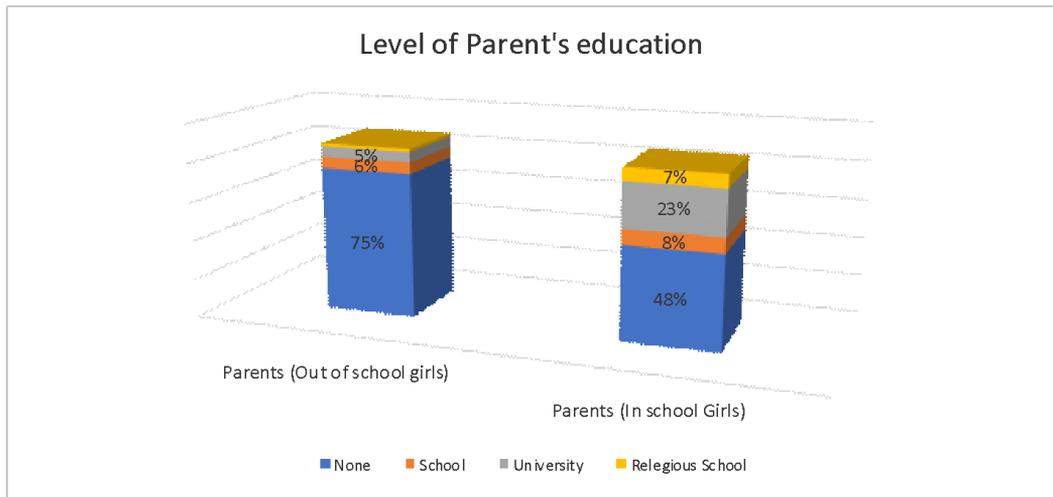
to the girls education and can be considered as a challenge across the education system.

### **Who is deciding:**

Families are mainly the decision makers in terms of continuation of education for girls. In most cases it is the male family members like brother, father and husband who makes the decision. There is also a number of respondents who mentioned that due to low quality of education they decided to leave school, and no one has forced them. From among the respondents to this question 186 respondents 64% were forced by male members of the family to leave school while 104 respondents indicated that due to the low quality of education, they decided not to continue education. It should be noted that this response can be influenced by the fear of the respondents not to disclose information about their family's decision. This finding was also confirmed in the interview with parents of the out of school girls. From the total of 265 person interviewed; at least 106 mentioned that such decisions are made by fathers.

### **Parents' Education level:**

Substantial research has concluded that the level of education of the head of household is a strong predictive indicator for demand of education for their children. The table below shows the level of education for the parents of girls who stopped going to school as well as the girls who are still in school. There is a considerable difference between the level of education of parents in each category. While there are clearly a high percentage of parents in the category of in school girls who are still supportive of their daughters continuing education but the fact that lack of education of parents probably contributed to the situation in the out of school girls; who were stopped going to school cannot be ignored.



Moreover; level of education has also a direct link with the economic situation of families and can be considered as underlying factor for families who are forced to stop their daughters going to school due to economic hardships.



# Section Three

Retention strategies applied

### **Role of school administration:**

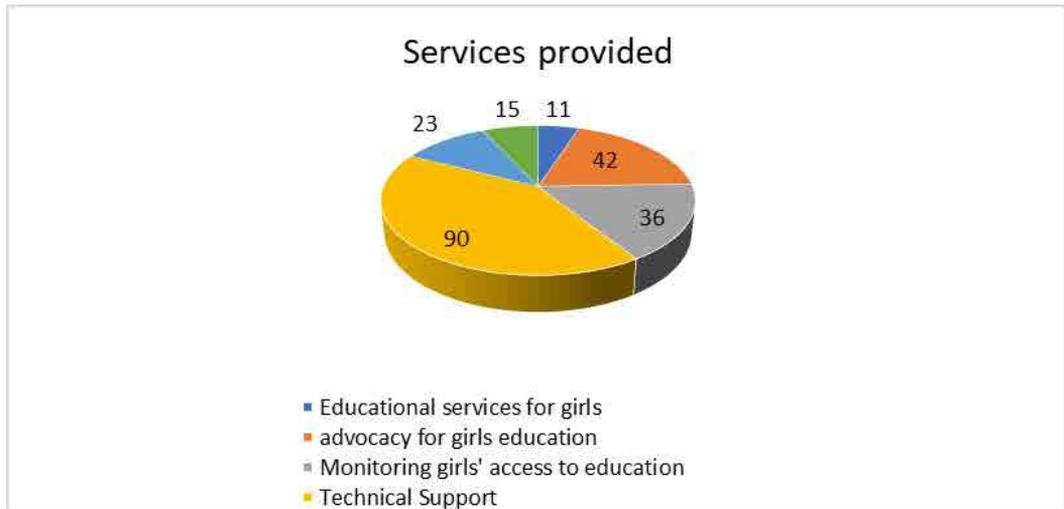
Not much has been done to prevent girls' dropout by the administration of schools. Although information on the situation is available and a lot has been written about the causes and consequences of girls' dropout from school but measures to prevent this from happening is not very considerable. The administrators mentioned that they normally seek support from parent' committee in helping the girls to stay in school.

In addition; the research team was not able to identify any mechanism or approach through which the school administrator will notice that certain girls are at risk of dropping out, thus preventing it from happening.

The only strategy mentioned frequently by the school's administration was ongoing consultation and discussion with the parent's committee in the schools. Parent's committee meetings were mentioned few times by the respondents as a mechanism initiated in some of the schools. However further information on the quality of these meetings and their achievements are not yet available.

### **Role of Civil Society and Donors:**

Girls access and retention in the school is one of the important issues for most of CSOs in Afghanistan. There are also donors and supporting organizations who are providing financial and technical support in boosting education for girls. The organizations interviewed for this research confirmed that they are supporting girls to stay in the school and complete their education. The type and level of support provided by the organizations vary from sole advocacy to case by case support and counseling.



However, most of the respondents in this category announced that they are less satisfied with the quality of girls' education in Afghanistan. Organizations and institutions active in the field of women's rights and education in targeted provinces also highlighted some of the major issues with regards to the girl's education in their region. Those issue includes; difference between quality of education in urban and rural areas, low quality of education, distance and commuting challenges, lack of professional teachers as well as female teachers.

### **The National Policy of Girls' Education:**

In response to the dire situation with regards to girls' access to school and concerns around high rate of girls' dropout from school; the ministry of education has developed a policy paper in February 2019. The objectives of the policy include;

- a) addressing challenges towards education for women and girls,
- b) decreasing the gap between boys and girls' rate of attendance and

c) positive discrimination for female teachers and staff of the Ministry of education.

The policy address most of the areas identified in this research report and provide practical advises to the concern authorities to ensure barriers to girls' education is addressed and the retention rate is increased. The policy in brief includes the following areas:

- Increasing the quality of education
- Addressing gender equality in the educational cubiculum
- Improving the capacity of teachers
- Ensure that schools are safe and are free from harassment
- Ensure girls who are married and or have siblings to take care of; receive support form kindergarten while they are at school;
- Extend access to school for pregnant women who would otherwise have to drop out of school
- Increase access to community-based education including accelerated education for girls who want to return to school

The policy also suggests establishment of a technical committee with the membership of developmental partners to oversee the implementation of the policy and ensure girls' retention in the schools. The impact of the policy in supporting girl's retention to school is yet to be assessed.

The ministry of education is well aware of the challenges faced by girls in the education system and agrees that there should be stronger strategic support to ensure the challenges are addressed. In the interview with the representative of the Ministry<sup>34</sup> it was mentioned that the financial resources allocated to the ministry is 12% of the total national budget ranking this ministry in the 3rd grade; however, giving the dire needs in this sector the budget is not sufficient.

The ministry also confirmed that their efforts in building girls schools,

---

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mr. Abdul Same Sulimanzada, Ministry of Education

building surrounding walls in the existing schools, recruitment of female teachers and addressing the issue of hygiene and water in the girls' schools are part of the ongoing programs in the ministry.



# **Section Four**

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

## Conclusion

Experts in education sector believes that Afghanistan is unlikely to meet Millennium Development Goals (2<sup>35</sup> and 3<sup>36</sup> unless further action is taken to bring about parity in education. For every 3 boys enrolled in school, 5 girls will have to be enrolled. This increase requires focused and targeted efforts from all actors<sup>37</sup>. In addition; there should be additional resources in place to ensure girls are kept in the school through - out the education cycle. Securing girls' access to education and ensuring that they are in fact able to complete secondary schooling above all requires political commitment and leadership at the highest levels. The research report has identified a number of key reasons contributing to drop out among girls. Following are key issues and conclusions:

While there are a lot of advocacy cantered to the high rate of dropout of girls from the school; in practice not much has been done to prevent this from happening. This research was not able to identify any key steps or actions taken to prevent girls from dropping out nor found any tangible strategy or set of actions to ensure girls are back to school.

Role of religious scholars and leaders have been identified as key in preventing girls' drop out; however, not much has been done to systematically engage those religious leaders in the discussion and the process of addressing the issue.

One of the main areas of intervention that supposedly can help prevent dropout is identified as motivating parents. The report also found a number of references made to the parent's committees associated

---

35 To ensure that children universally – including both boys and girls – will be able to complete a full course of primary education by 2015.

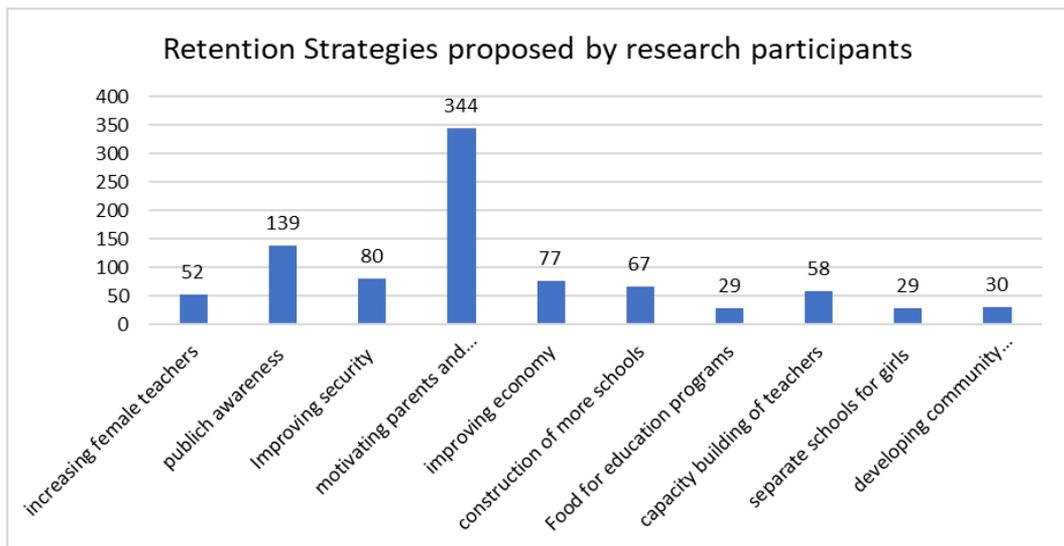
36 To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015

37 I won't be doctor and one day you will be sick; girl's access to education in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch 2017

with the schools. However; not much information on the quality of these committees and their achievements were available at the time of interviews.

## Recommendations

People engaged in this research including girls out of school, girls in school and all others involved in the sector of education who are concern about retention of girls in school and ensuring they have the opportunity to grow with skills and capacities; have helped us throughout the data collection phase to come up with practical strategies and action that will contribute to the cause. The recommendations provided by the participants of the research can be considered much more valuable than those the researchers would suggest; as these kinds of recommendations are coming from practical experiences of the beneficiaries who have lived the challenges in access to education.



Among the recommendations; working with parent and families as well

as public awareness raising are stand higher than others. It is important that the parents' committees that are established in each school become more involved and active and receive supports from all the stakeholders including the ministry of education to address challenges girls are facing in their way to complete education. The committee can also adopt strategies to help and identify risk of drop out before it occurs and prevent it from happening.

In addition; in this research we are also reinstating the recommendations made by credible research reports released recently by other organizations. Those mainly include recommendations made in the Out of School Children of UNICEF's report and the report published by Human Rights Watch. Some of the recommendations highlighted below:

- Promptly implement the National Action Plan to end child marriage, with the goal of ending all child marriage by 2030, as aimed for in Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3.
- Strengthen the role of the province-level Child Protection Action Networks (CPANs) and give them responsibility for assisting all out-of-school children. Ensure that educators, communities and local government officials work with the local CPAN to protect the most vulnerable children, including out of school children, and children at risk of child marriage and child labor, and provide them with access to child protection services, where available.
- Ensure teachers are provided domestically competitive salaries, commensurate with their roles, and provide financial incentives to encourage teachers, especially female teachers, to work in remote or under-served areas of the country
- Ensure girls' learning facilities meet basic security and health standards. Schools should have walls, closed toilets, handwashing

- stations and provide access to a nearby source of drinkable water.
- Ensure universal access to free primary and secondary education, by providing all needed school supplies, abolishing uniform requirements, reforming the system for providing textbooks, hiring and deploying more female teachers, and rehabilitating and building new schools.
- Issue orders to all Afghan security forces, including the Afghan military, police, and pro-government militias to avoid use of schools for military purposes.
- Focus on girls' education and gendered approaches
- Develop concrete rationale in favour of girls' education. The arguments to address the socio-cultural traditions limiting girls' education should be used continuously in community mobilizations and working with parents.
- Financial incentives for poor rural girls should also be provided to help delay marriage and support with the cost of education.
- More female teachers in rural areas should be recruited.

The report also draws on the recommendations made internationally on the issue of out of school children by UN and International organization<sup>38</sup>.

- Provide conditional cash transfers, stipends or scholarships;
- Reduce distance to school;
- Target boys and men to be a part of discussions about cultural and societal practices;
- Ensure gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogies;
- Hire and train qualified female teachers;
- Build safe and inclusive learning environments for girls and young women;
- End child/early marriage; and
- Address violence against girls and women.

---

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>



### **Article 43**

Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (license), free of charge by the state.

The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, and to provide compulsory intermediate level education.

The state is also required to provide the opportunity to teach native languages in the areas where they are spoken.

