



By: TA | AP Brief

More than two million Afghan girls shut out of secondary schools



An estimated 2.4 million **Afghan girls** remain excluded from secondary education five years after the Taliban took over the country, a U.N. agency said Tuesday, renewing a call for an immediate restoration of their right to education.

UNESCO, the Paris-based U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, said the continued exclusion of women and girls from education amounted to a grave violation of their fundamental rights.

“Afghanistan remains the only country in the world where girls and women are formally banned from secondary and higher education,” Hoda Jaberian, UNESCO’s program coordinator for education in emergencies, said in a news conference by video. “Five years is not a temporary interruption in a child’s education. It is clearly almost an entire secondary school cycle.”

Jaberian said: “UNESCO continues to call for the immediate and unconditional restoration of **girls and women's right** to secondary and higher education.

It is not negotiable. It’s a basic human right and we reiterate that there is no substitute for this.”

The Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, 2021, as U.S. and NATO forces **withdrew** from the country after two decades of war.

Shortly after, it barred girls from secondary schools and later extended the restrictions to higher education, employment and other sectors, effectively excluding women and girls from public life.

Restrictions are reversing two decades of progress

The Taliban has maintained the ban despite appeals from the United Nations, humanitarian groups, humanrights advocates, and several Islamic countries, insisting the issue is a domestic matter.

Jaberian said the restrictions are reversing two decades of progress that Afghanistan had made in education.

By 2021 nearly 1 million girls were enrolled in secondary education

While access to schooling for girls was severely limited in 2001, by 2021 nearly 1 million girls were enrolled in secondary education.

“Afghanistan had made really major progress in expanding girls’ access to education,” Jaberian said. “But unfortunately, much of that progress now has been completely reversed.”

UNESCO has been supporting education in Afghanistan by running community-based education, literacy and skills development programs.

The skills development and literacy classes take place in community spaces, often inside the homes of the literacy facilitators — with the knowledge of the authorities, the agency said.

It said there were more than 1,000 literacy facilitators, most of them trained by UNESCO and its partners.

“While the restriction remains, we cannot abandon Afghan learners,” Jaberian said. “UNESCO work with communities and our partners from the communities to preserve every possible pathway to learning.”