



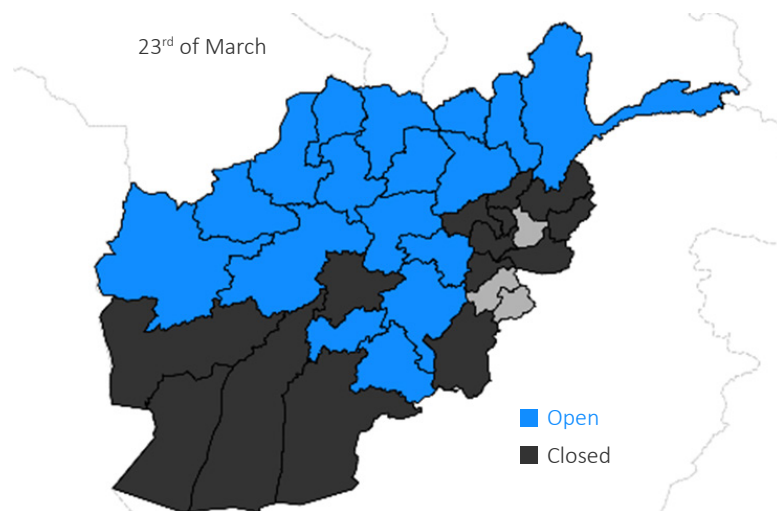
BACK TO SCHOOL

SITUATION UPDATE

APRIL
2022



Secondary education: continued ban for girls



On 23 March, contrary to earlier announcements made by the Ministry of Education, the de-facto authorities (DFA) requested girls to remain at home until further notice. This announcement, made through a tweet from the Ministry of Education, came as a surprise to girls, schools, NGOs, and governments, and created confusion throughout the country. In many places, school opening ceremonies were in full swing. Initially, in around 17 provinces secondary schools were kept open for girls, including in Kabul, but once the announcement was confirmed and followed up with an official letter, schools started sending girls' home – particularly in Kabul.

We are deeply saddened by the horrific attacks on a high school and education centre in Western Kabul, killing at least 6, and injuring dozens on 19 April 2022. The senseless loss of life, and the inevitable repercussions within communities show yet again the right to education being threatened. In addition to the girls' secondary school closures, another overwhelming barrier to learning is the fear and insecurity which families often associate with continuing to attend school in Afghanistan, and which is reinforced by attacks of this nature.

Summary

As of the 16th of April, eight provinces continued providing secondary education for girls. However, in some of these eight provinces, the picture is mixed with girls perhaps only returning in a few districts, or in schools that only have the facilities and teachers to provide a fully segregated education. The ban is directly affecting 1,1 million secondary school girls.

The decision made by the DFA, as well as its last-minute nature and the way it was communicated, has left girls, parents and their wider communities devastated.





We haven't gone to school for two years and I've missed our class, my classmates, my teachers and my studies. I want to go to school, I want other girls to go to school. I want boys to go to school and I want all Afghan children to go to school.

– Zahra, 15





Back to school: PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Afghanistan has two different school calendars. In most provinces (the 28 so-called cold climate provinces), the school year starts on the 23rd of March until the end of November. In the six hot climate provinces, the school year runs from September-June. In the weeks leading up to the 23rd of March, expectations were high as the Ministry had announced the new school year was planned to start for all children at all levels – confirming this publicly as late as Saturday 21 March. This was due to include over one million female secondary education students who had been waiting for this moment since the 17th of September 2021, when they were asked to stay at home.

In addition to the 1.8 million boys in secondary education who have returned to school, there are around 5.8 million children in primary education across Afghanistan. Of these **2.3 mln are girls**. Their education is facilitated by around 130,000 teachers of which 41% are female (around 53,000). Despite restrictions, back-to-school campaigns have been successfully conducted in multiple provinces, and we continue to see high level of engagement and attendance where schools have reopened. The Provincial Education Directorate and the local authorities have supported the initiative for the back-to-school campaign for all primary education children for both girls and boys.

The Education Cluster partners, in close collaboration with UNICEF, put in motion a **real-time back-to-school monitoring system to generate evidence at the school level** to better understand the situation in terms of who (teachers and students) are back in school, at both primary and secondary level, and where boys and girls have been able to return. This is to inform both targeted advocacy and response.

Information is gathered directly and in real-time through observational visits to both primary and secondary schools, and feedback back from UNICEF staff and extenders, and Cluster partners. The information gathered is not representative of every district across every province, however, it provides a good sense of the overall situation across provinces and an initial idea of access to education at local levels.

Per 16th of April, **558 schools (312 primary (56%) and 246 secondary schools (44%) in 23 (67%) out of the 34 provinces** have been visited.

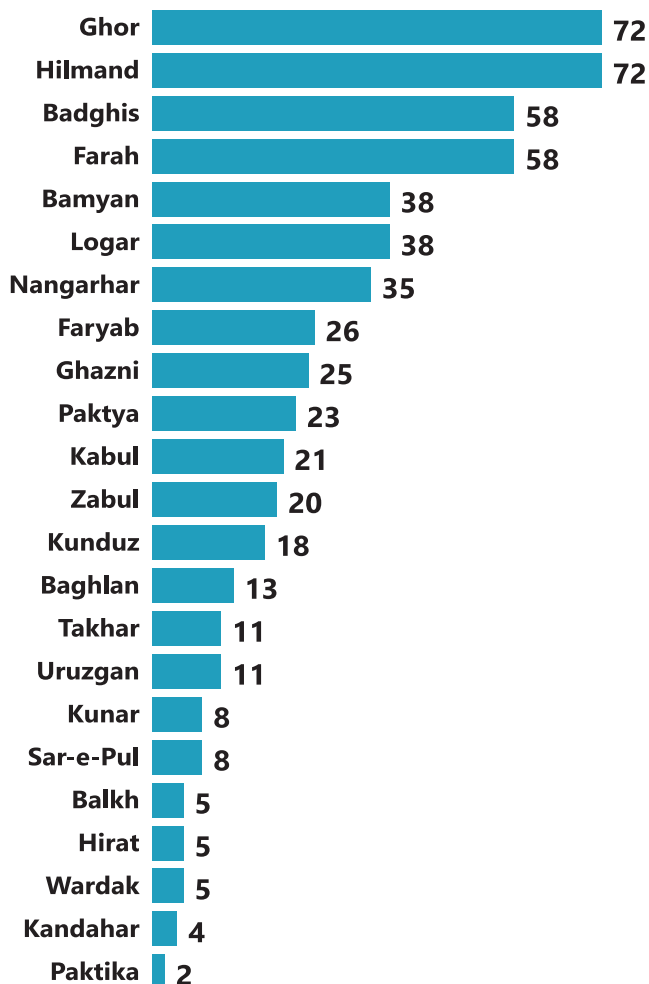




Key observations:

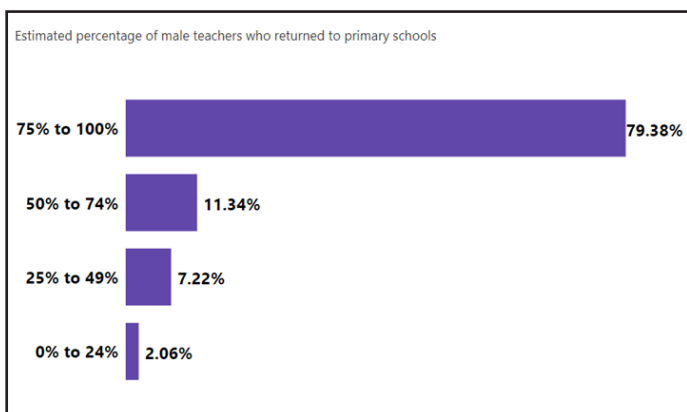
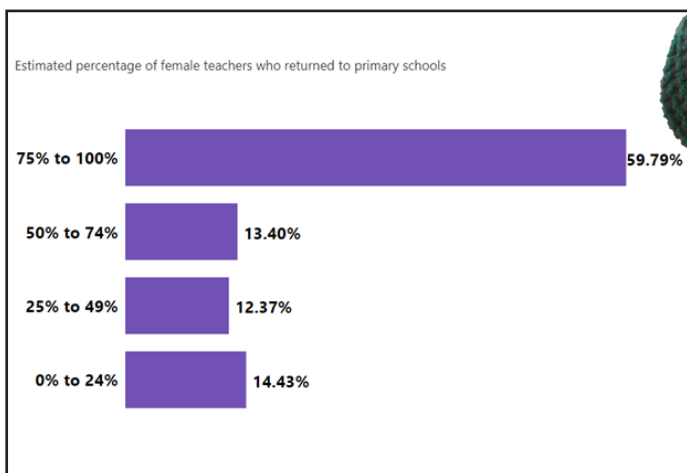
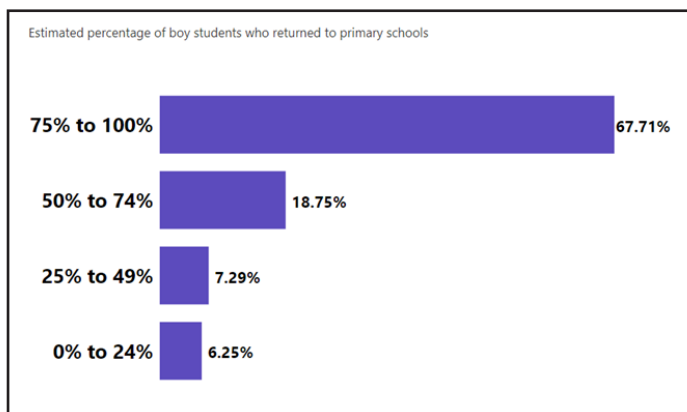
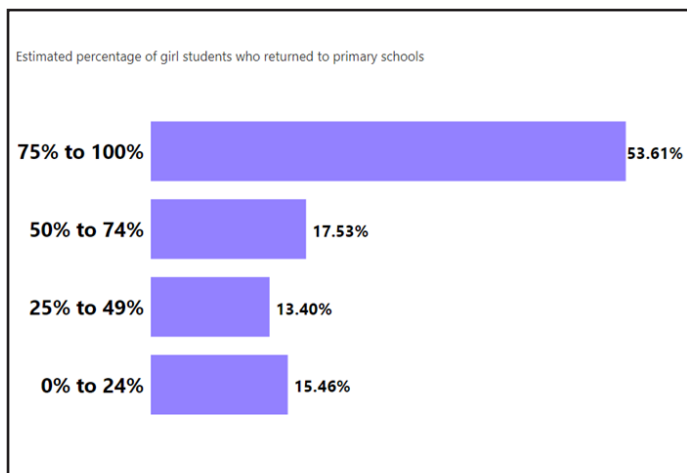
- Over 70% of boys and girls are back in primary education. However, the observation shows a higher percentage of boys coming back to school than girls.
- The trend in teacher presence in primary schools is similar to the trend student presence, for both male and female teachers.
- The low participation of girls in secondary education is consistent with the high number of provinces where secondary schools are closed for girls.
- Most boys are back in secondary education – with a higher percentage than those in primary education.
- The presence of secondary education teachers in schools is relatively high.

Total schools visited per province

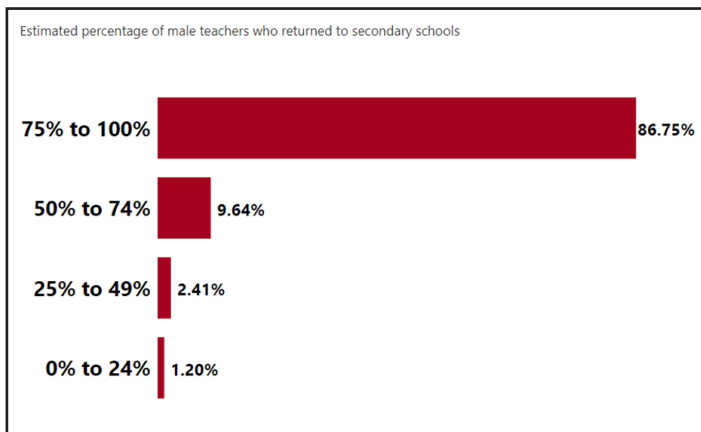
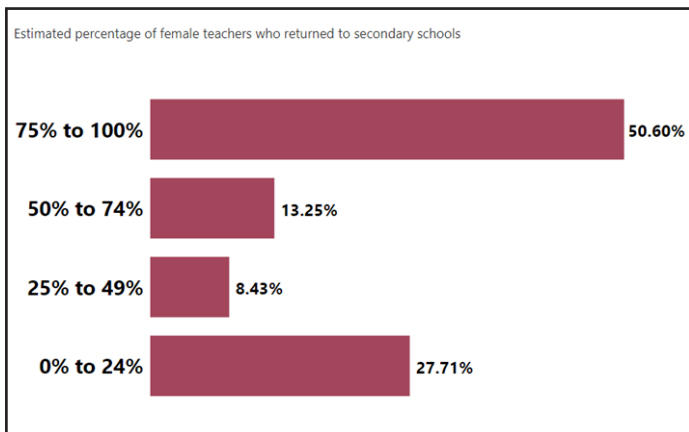
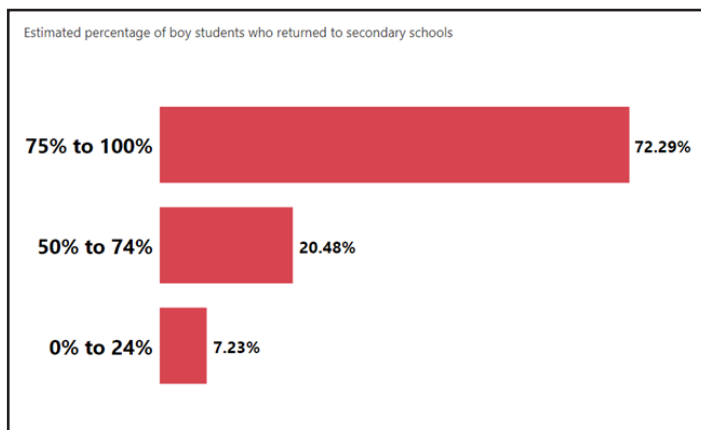
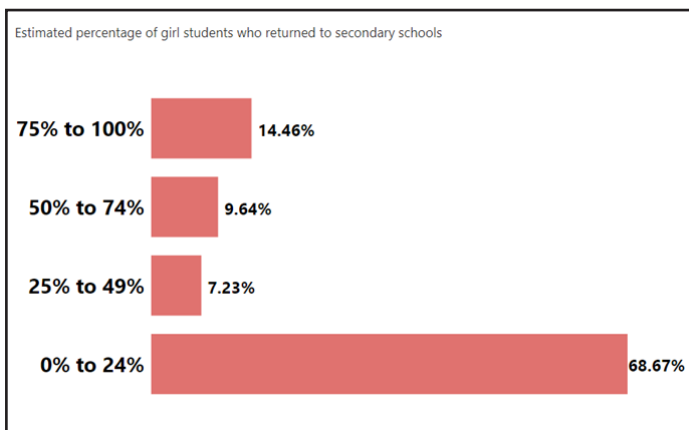


NB: the percentages are not statistically representative and only indicative of broader trends.

Back to school – Primary Education



Back to school: secondary education



Conclusion

While only indicative, these findings reflect those from across Education Cluster partners, which indicates that we can have confidence in the summary findings. Girls in most provinces have not returned to school. As a result, they are at heightened risk of further rights issues including protection concerns such as child marriage, labour, exploitation, and abuse.

However, the picture is not uniform. While the vast majority of secondary aged girls are not back in school, some have been able to return, and primary-level education has largely continued for both girls and boys, though with pre-existing access and quality challenges and gender parity gaps.

While advocating for access for all girls – at all levels – to return to school, efforts must continue to protect education for those girls who have access, reinforcing the structures able to deliver this. Alongside this, education partners – with the support of donors – should continue efforts to improve women’s inclusion in the workforce, including work to train more female teachers and build a more sustainable, equitable education system.





It is essential for women and men to be educated. As much as boys want a chance to improve their lives, we girls also want this chance. Girls have the right to be educated. Education and studying completely changes people's lives and futures. If you have a dream, [with education] you can achieve it.

– Hasina, 14



Next steps

The Education Cluster and its partners will continue to monitor the progress of children's return to school until the end of April – deepening this analysis, identifying trends, and confirming some of these findings.

In addition, education partners will continue strategic negotiations with the DFA, donors and local organisations to advocate for the right – of both girls and boys – to education, including the need for an inclusive workforce.



Recommendations

- 1. Governments, donors, and the humanitarian community to continue engagement with the DFA's and relevant ministries to reopen schools to all girls.** This engagement should remain principled and rights-based.
- 2. Donors and governments to continue their investment in education.** 2.3 mln girls in primary school, as well as those still accessing secondary education, rely on humanitarian and development funding to continue their education. Despite current issues facing the majority of secondary- age girls, we must continue to support these girls and protect their access.
- 3. Donors support the expansion of Community Based Education (CBE).** Not only is there scope, as an interim option, to expand the geographic scale of CBE, but programming could include secondary school girls. While this is not an alternative to formal school-based education, CBE is part of the formal system and can be explored as a short-term alternative.
- 4. The Education Cluster, partners, and local actors to explore additional alternative modalities.** While alternatives to accessing secondary schools should not be institutionalized, all actors to scope the feasibility of short-term alternatives. This could include distance learning, mobile and home-based education, and other possible approaches.
- 5. Donors, governments and education partners to continue longer-term efforts to and create exit strategies for humanitarian approaches.** For instance, programming to increase the number of female teachers and increase the scale of primary education through rehabilitation and construction of schools, will be critical – in the longer term – to the quality and access of education for both boys and girls.

