

## In Afghanistan, Out of Conflict and Into School

More kids have been enrolling in primary school in Afghanistan than had been expected since the rebuilding started two years ago. More than 5 million students, though more boys than girls are enrolled.

Girls traditionally didn't go to school in Afghanistan. That attitude is slowly changing but girls still need to overcome all sorts of obstacles to be allowed an education.

### Girls Could Get Hurt or Even Kidnapped Going to School

National security or police presence is limited outside Kabul, Afghanistan's capital. "There are still local warlords and militia in many parts of Afghanistan," says Habibullah Wajdi, a World Bank education specialist in Afghanistan.

"Parents fear if they let their girls walk to school there's more of a chance that they could be nabbed," Wajdi says.

"Incidents like burning of tents and school buildings, explosions near schools, and threats to female teachers still occur," he adds.

### Cultural Bias Against Educating Girls Is Widespread

Educating girls is much more widely accepted among the urban population than the rural.

"The traditional Islamic view meant a very conservative attitude toward female education," Wajdi says.

Even before the conflicts, girls rarely went to school except in a few cities. Today, girls make up 35 to 58% of students in cities such as Herat and Kabul.

But in rural areas, especially in the South and East, girls account for 20% or less of students. These figures fall to below 10% in the former Taliban strongholds of southern Afghanistan.


### Not Enough Female Teachers

Most teachers in Kabul are female, but there aren't enough female teachers elsewhere. This also precludes girls from going to school.

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Girls make up 35% of the school enrollments in Afghanistan.

“For most communities, the presence of a female teacher is essential for parents wanting to send their girls to school,” says Wajdi.

### **Lack of Appropriate School Buildings**

The type of school building could also decide whether a girl goes to school or not.

“In the southern region, communities demand buildings with the provision of Pardah—a school with a boundary wall,” Wajdi says. This way girls can be separated from boys.

With international assistance, Afghanistan is working on providing alternatives, including establishing schools in mosques and homes, tents with Pardah facilities, and new, basic buildings.

### **Helping Out at Home**

often it's simply poverty that bars girls from getting an education. In rural areas, daughters usually have to help their mothers look after other siblings and do household chores, Wajdi says. There is no time to go to school.

### **Attitudes Are Changing Despite These Obstacles**

Overall, parents' attitude towards educating their daughters is changing. “It is now possible for women to go to university and become doctors and families now understand the value of educating all their children,” concludes Wajdi.