

RCMUN 2026 | Historical Security Council

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue 1: The question of women's rights and access to education under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Student Officer: Atalanta Baez

Women's rights and access to education under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan

Articles:

<https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11646>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/banned-education-review-right-education-afghanistan>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education/afghanistan>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/afghanistan-14-million-girls-still-banned-school-de-facto-authorities>

<https://afghanhrcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Access-to-Education-for-Women.pdf>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1162826>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20rq73p3z4o>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3pgn48wnqo>

Videos:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/ceqpdgr4vqeo>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/ckgwk3lvkk6o>

<https://youtu.be/GSZAaOb9dlg?si=b8xD6IBLibHRBr43>

<https://youtu.be/e1JpC2w5nb0?si=P99J3TORjNpYumXN>

Key Terms:

- **Taliban:** An Islamist fundamentalist movement governing Afghanistan since August 2021, enforcing a strict interpretation of Sharia law through decrees that have systematically dismantled women's rights to education, work, and freedom of movement.
- **Gender Apartheid:** A system of institutionalised, state-enforced discrimination in which women and girls are comprehensively excluded from public life on the basis of sex. Increasingly used by the UN to describe Taliban governance, drawing a deliberate parallel with racial apartheid to underscore that the exclusion is structural and enforced by law.
- **Right to Education:** Enshrined in Article 26 of the UDHR and Article 13 of the ICESCR, this is the internationally recognised entitlement of every person to access education without discrimination. Afghanistan's ratification of CEDAW in 2003 further extends specific protections for women and girls.
- **Mahram System:** The Taliban's requirement that women be accompanied in public by a close male relative at all times. This functions as a structural barrier to education and employment, as women without an eligible guardian are effectively barred from participating in public life regardless of any other decree.
- **Accountability Gap:** The difficulty of applying conventional international legal mechanisms to the Taliban, which is not a recognised sovereign government. This gap

between existing violations and available enforcement tools is central to the challenge delegates must address in this committee.

- De facto authorities: the UN's standard term for the Taliban administration: acknowledges effective territorial control without conferring recognition as the legitimate government.

- Universal jurisdiction: the principle allowing a national court to prosecute grave international crimes regardless of where they occurred or the nationality of those involved. One of the few routes around the enforcement problem.

- Community-based education (CBE): informal classes run in homes or village spaces by NGOs and local facilitators, often the only provision reaching girls excluded from formal schools.

- Mahram: the male relative himself (father, brother, husband, son), as distinct from the mahram system.

- Gender persecution: the specific charge under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute used in the ICC warrants. Requires proof of discriminatory acts against an identifiable group, which is why it isn't the same as gender apartheid.

- CEDAW Article 29: the dispute-resolution clause: negotiation, then arbitration, then referral to the ICJ. The mechanism Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands invoked.

- Independent investigative mechanism: the body created by A/HRC/RES/60/2 to collect and preserve evidence to criminal-law standards for future proceedings.

- Conditionality: tying recognition, sanctions relief or asset release to policy change. The dominant post-2021 strategy and the one most open to challenge in debate.

- Doha process: the UN-convened talks between international envoys and the de facto authorities, where girls' education has repeatedly stalled negotiations.

Overview:

The exclusion of women and girls from education in Afghanistan is the only case of its kind in the world today. Afghanistan is the sole country that prohibits girls from attending secondary school and bars women from university, a distinction it has held since December 2022 ("Afghanistan: 1.4 Million Girls Still Banned from School by De Facto Authorities"). The issue has been raised in nearly every organ of the United Nations, and the Human Rights Council has addressed it through an annual resolution, a dedicated Special Rapporteur mandate, and, since October 2025, a standing investigative body created specifically to gather evidence of crimes committed in the country.

The restrictions began almost immediately after the Taliban seized Kabul on 15 August 2021. Secondary schools reopened the following month for boys only. On 23 March 2022 the Ministry of Education announced that girls' schools would reopen and reversed the decision within hours, sending students home from classrooms they had already entered. In December 2022 women were suspended from all public and private universities, and in December 2024 the closure of midwifery and nursing institutes removed the last formal training available to Afghan women (UNESCO, *Banned from Education*).

The numbers have grown every year since, because each new cohort of girls reaches the age limit of twelve. UNESCO counted 1.4 million girls deliberately deprived of secondary education in August 2024; by August 2026 that figure had reached approximately 2.4 million and is projected to approach four million by 2030. The damage extends beyond the girls directly barred. Primary enrolment fell from 6.8 million children in 2019 to 5.7 million in 2022, a consequence of the ban on women teaching boys, which stripped the system of qualified staff it has no means of replacing. University enrolment overall has fallen by 53 per cent since 2021.

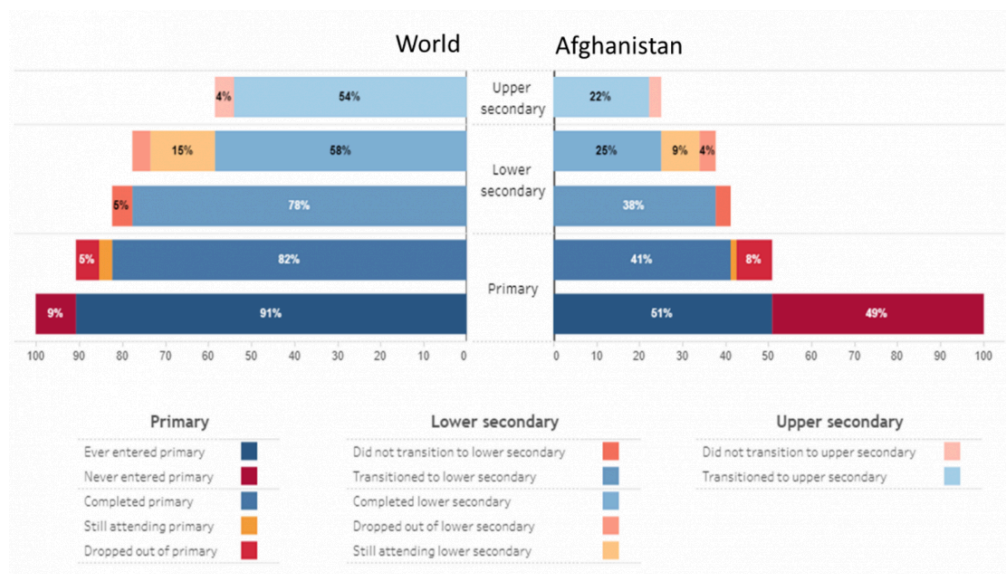
Education is only one layer of a wider architecture of exclusion. The mahram system requires that women be accompanied in public by a close male relative, and the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, enacted in August 2024, gave that requirement statutory force. UNAMA has documented inspectors in Kandahar instructing shopkeepers to deny entry to unaccompanied women, and a hospital ordered not to treat unaccompanied female

patients. A woman with no available male relative is confined to her home regardless of what any education decree permits.

International legal responses have advanced considerably but remain difficult to enforce. On 8 July 2025 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Taliban Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani for the crime against humanity of gender persecution, which the Taliban rejected outright. In September 2024 Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands invoked Article 29 of CEDAW, beginning the procedural route towards a case at the International Court of Justice. The Human Rights Council itself adopted resolution A/HRC/RES/60/2 without a vote on 6 October 2025, establishing a mechanism mandated to "collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of international crimes" for use in future prosecutions (International Commission of Jurists).

The central difficulty is that none of these instruments can compel compliance from authorities that most states do not recognise, that were nonetheless recognised by Russia in July 2025, and that have absorbed four years of isolation without altering a single core policy.

Statistics and Infographics:



Women's rights and access to education in Afghanistan

Key events, 1996-2026

FIRST TALIBAN RULE · 1996-2001

- Sep 1996 Taliban seize Kabul; girls' schools closed nationwide
- Dec 2001 Regime falls; girls' schools begin reopening

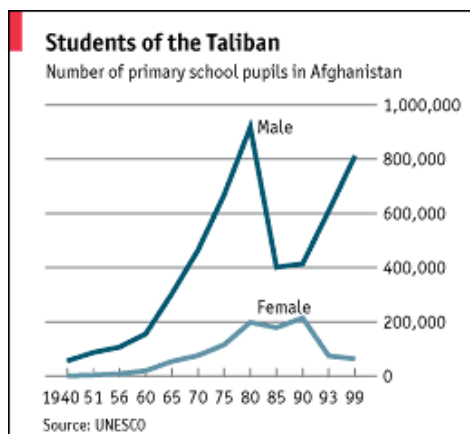
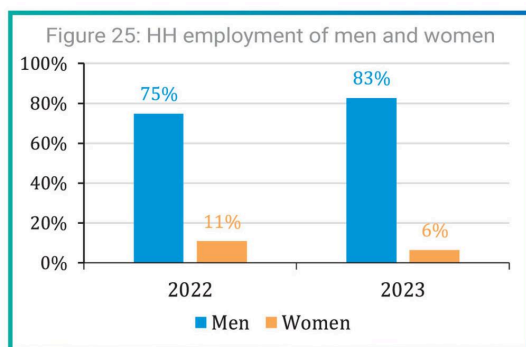
RECONSTRUCTION ERA · 2001-2021

- 2003 Afghanistan ratifies CEDAW and the Rome Statute
- 2004 New constitution guarantees equal rights to education
- 2001-2018 Enrolment rises from ~1 million to ~10 million students
- Feb 2020 Doha Agreement signed; no protections for women

SECOND TALIBAN RULE · 2021-PRESENT

- Aug 2021 Taliban retake Kabul as US and NATO forces withdraw
- Sep 2021 Girls barred from school beyond grade 6
- Mar 2022 Announced reopening of girls' schools reversed within hours
- Dec 2022 Women suspended from all public and private universities
- Aug 2024 Morality law codifies the mahram requirement
- Dec 2024 Midwifery and nursing training closed to women
- Jul 2025 ICC issues arrest warrants for gender persecution
- Oct 2025 HRC creates independent investigative mechanism
- Aug 2026 UNESCO: 2.4 million girls barred from secondary school

Sources: UNESCO, UNAMA, OHCHR, International Criminal Court



Major Parties:

The Taliban (de facto authorities of Afghanistan): the party responsible for the restrictions and the only one with the power to lift them. Since seizing Kabul in August 2021 they have issued over a hundred decrees governing what women and girls may study, wear and where they may go. Their position is that these policies conform to Sharia and Afghan tradition, and that the treatment of women is an internal matter not open to negotiation. Reported divisions exist between pragmatists in Kabul who seek recognition and economic normalisation, and the Kandahar leadership around Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, which has consistently overruled them.

Afghan women, girls and civil society: the principal stakeholders, and not a single bloc. Some organisations prioritise recognising gender apartheid as an international crime; others prioritise humanitarian access and alternative education even where that requires dealing with the de facto authorities. Underground schools, diaspora-run online platforms and documentation networks operate at considerable personal risk. UNESCO and UN Women both insist that any solution be led by Afghan women themselves.

UNESCO and UNAMA: the two UN bodies most directly engaged. UNESCO produces the authoritative enrolment data and runs community-based literacy and radio education programmes across 20 provinces. UNAMA monitors and reports on human rights violations under its Security Council mandate, documenting the enforcement of the mahram system and the denial of services to unaccompanied women.

The European Union: leads the annual Human Rights Council resolution on Afghanistan and drove the creation of the independent investigative mechanism in October 2025. Favours documentation, accountability and principled non-recognition.

Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands: in September 2024 these four states invoked Article 29 of CEDAW against Afghanistan, the first procedural step towards a case at the International Court of Justice. Around 22 further states have expressed support. Their approach targets the state rather than individuals, which avoids the recognition problem.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation: OIC bodies and senior scholars from member states including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Indonesia have stated that the education ban has no basis in Islamic jurisprudence, denying the Taliban the religious legitimacy their position rests on. Qatar hosts the Doha process and serves as the principal intermediary.

Russia: became the first state to formally recognise the Taliban government in July 2025, having lifted the group's terrorist designation earlier that year. Frames engagement in terms of security cooperation and trade, which significantly weakens the isolation strategy pursued by other states.

The International Criminal Court: issued arrest warrants on 8 July 2025 for Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani for the crime against humanity of gender persecution. The Taliban rejected the Court's authority outright, and the Court has no means of enforcing the warrants.

Possible Solutions:

The Human Rights Council must find a course of action that responds to a violation no member state disputes, but which no existing mechanism has reversed. Delegates should consider endorsing the codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, closing the gap left by the Rome Statute, which recognises racial apartheid but not its gender equivalent. The Council should also debate how to sustain the independent investigative mechanism established under A/HRC/RES/60/2, whose founding text permits it to advance only as funding allows, and whether the CEDAW Article 29 initiative brought by Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands should be encouraged towards referral to the International Court of Justice. Members may explore expanding accredited alternative education, so that girls learning through community-based classes or underground schools can obtain qualifications recognised outside Afghanistan, while weighing the argument that parallel provision relieves pressure on the de facto authorities. Delegates should also consider engagement through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the approach least easily dismissed as external interference. Taking into account the positions of all parties, the Human Rights Council must reach a resolution that advances accountability without relying on

enforcement mechanisms four years of practice have shown to be ineffective, that provides for the meaningful participation of Afghan women, and that keeps the restoration of full and equal access to education as its objective rather than settling for the management of its absence.

Committee Objective:

The goal of the Human Rights Council at RCMUN is to find solutions and foster international cooperation regarding the question of women's rights and access to education under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. By examining the positions of all major parties, and the broader implications for the international human rights system, the committee hopes to reach a resolution that addresses both the immediate exclusion of millions of girls from education and the longer-term problem of enforcing human rights obligations against an authority that rejects them. Keeping in mind the legal, religious, and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis, delegates should strive for rigorous debate working towards collective action. In order to fulfil these goals, nations should agree on resolutions including such as: accountability and documentation mechanisms, accredited alternative education pathways, coordinated diplomatic and jurisprudential engagement, and guarantees for the participation of Afghan women in implementation – all aimed at producing a viable response that keeps the full restoration of the right to education as its objective.

Sources:

Al Jazeera. "UNESCO Says 2.4 Million Afghan Girls Denied Access to Further Education."

Al Jazeera, 11 August 2026,

www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/11/unesco-says-2-4-million-afghan-girls-denied-access-to-further-education.

Al Jazeera. "Russia Recognises the Taliban: Which Other Countries May Follow?" *Al*

Jazeera, 4 July 2025,

RCMUN 2026 | Historical Security Council

www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/4/russia-recognises-the-taliban-which-other-countries-may-follow.

Atlantic Council. "Five Questions (and Expert Answers) about the ICC Arrest Warrants against Taliban Leaders for Crimes against Women and Girls." *Atlantic Council*, 9 July 2025, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/five-questions-and-expert-answers-about-the-icc-arrest-warrants-against-taliban-leaders-for-crimes-against-women-and-girls/.

Congressional Research Service. "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy in Brief." *CRS*, IF11646, www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11646.

Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Accountability Needed for Gender Persecution, Other Grave Crimes." *HRW*, 26 February 2026, www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/26/afghanistan-accountability-needed-for-gender-persecution-other-grave-crimes.

Human Rights Watch. "UN Rights Council Creates Afghanistan Accountability Body." *HRW*, 6 October 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/06/un-rights-council-creates-afghanistan-accountability-body.

International Bar Association. "Afghanistan: Potential ICJ Case a Step towards Justice for Afghan Women and Girls." *IBA*, www.ibanet.org/afghanistan-icj.

International Commission of Jurists. "Afghanistan: UN Human Rights Council Establishment of an Independent Investigative Mechanism Is a Major Step towards Accountability." *ICJ*, 7 October 2025, www.icj.org/afghanistan-un-human-rights-council-establishment-of-an-independent-investigative-mechanism-is-a-major-step-towards-accountability/.

International Criminal Court. "Situation in Afghanistan: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber II Issues Arrest Warrants for Haibatullah Akhundzada and Abdul Hakim Haqqani." *ICC*, 8 July 2025, www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-afghanistan-icc-pre-trial-chamber-ii-issues-arrest-warrants-haibatullah-akhundzada.

Malala Fund. "Gender Apartheid Brief – Issue 1." *Malala Fund*, January 2026, malala.org/news-and-voices/gender-apartheid-brief-issue-1.

RCMUN 2026 | Historical Security Council

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Establishment of Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan Answers the Call of Afghan Victims, Says UN Expert." *OHCHR*, October 2025, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/establishment-independent-investigative-mechanism-afghanistan-answers-call.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Human Rights Council Concludes Sixtieth Regular Session after Adopting 35 Resolutions." *OHCHR*, 8 October 2025, www.ohchr.org/en/meeting-summaries/2025/10/human-rights-council-concludes-sixtieth-regular-session-after-adopting-35.

Soltan, Axana. "From Persecution to Apartheid: The ICC's Next Legal Frontier for Women's Rights." *Opinio Juris*, 10 November 2025, opiniojuris.org/2025/11/10/from-persecution-to-apartheid-the-iccs-next-legal-frontier-for-womens-rights/.

UNESCO. "Afghanistan: 1.4 Million Girls Still Banned from School by De Facto Authorities." *UNESCO*, 15 August 2024, www.unesco.org/en/articles/afghanistan-14-million-girls-still-banned-school-de-facto-authorities.

UNESCO. *Banned from Education: A Review of the Right to Education in Afghanistan*. *UNESCO*, 26 March 2025, www.unesco.org/en/articles/banned-education-review-right-education-afghanistan.

UNESCO. "Protecting the Right to Education for All Afghans." *UNESCO*, www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education/afghanistan.

UNICEF USA. "Afghanistan's Education Ban Robs Girls of Their Future." *UNICEF USA*, August 2026, www.unicefusa.org/stories/afghanistans-education-ban-robs-girls-their-future.

United Nations. "Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan." *A/HRC/RES/60/2*, adopted 6 October 2025, digitallibrary.un.org/record/4090564.

UN News. "Afghanistan: Taliban Restrictions on Women's Rights Intensify." *UN News*, 1 May 2025, news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1162826.

RCMUN 2026 | Historical Security Council

UN News. "Four Years On, Here's What Total Exclusion of Women in Afghanistan Looks Like." *UN News*, August 2025, news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165622.

UN Women. "Four Years after Taliban Takeover, Afghans Overwhelmingly Back Girls' Education." *UN Women*, August 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/08/four-years-after-taliban-takeover-afghans-overwhelmingly-back-girls-education.