



Impact on Afghan Teachers of the Restrictions on the Right to Learn and to Teach

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Impact on Afghan Teachers of the Restrictions on the Right to Learn and to Teach

Research on Teachers' Status and Working Conditions
in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan

Table of content

Acknowledgement	6
Foreword	7
1. Introduction: The Afghan context and the work of Education International and its affiliates in the country	8
2. EI Survey: Elevating and amplifying the voices of Afghan teachers on the global stage	10
2.1 Geographical scope of the survey	10
2.2 Profile of respondents	12
2.3 Fundamental right to learn for girls and to teach for women	13
2.4 Wages	15
2.5 Satisfaction with the teaching experience and working conditions	17
2.6 Teacher status: the value of teaching in Afghan society	24
2.7 Labour rights	26
3. The current situation in Afghanistan: Challenges and improvements since the time the survey was completed	32
4. Summary of survey findings	35
5. Conclusions	39
List of abbreviations	40

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Foreword

Education is essential to progress worldwide, yet in countries impacted by conflict, children - especially girls - are often denied this basic right, and their nations embark on a dangerous course with significant and lasting impacts.

Afghanistan, with its continuing war on the education of its children, is well underway on this unsustainable path. In 2024, the International Labour Organisation noted “Afghanistan is among the poorest performers in providing sufficient education to its population”.

Since the Taliban’s takeover in 2021, access of girls to education has been significantly blocked, including closure of girls’ schools and a ban on girls’ education beyond 6th grade.

Against this backdrop, Education International moved to shine a light on the condition of Afghani teachers. Through surveys and interviews of teachers across the country, this research offers a glimpse of the challenges confronting them.

When access to education is curtailed, societies may miss out on valuable contributions from talented individuals and marginalised groups. Women, minorities, marginalised people, and those from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately affected. Even more dangerously, restricted access to education can lead to higher rates of disease and lower life expectancy.

EI will continue to urge the Government of Afghanistan to take decisive measures to improve the education system and ensure universal access to free quality education. This includes by supporting school enrolment and completion rates, both at the primary and secondary levels, particularly of girls.

David Edwards
General Secretary
Education International

1. Introduction: The Afghan context and the work of Education International and its affiliates in the country

Education International (EI)¹ is the Global Union Federation that brings together organisations of teachers and other education workers from across the world, including Afghanistan. EI advocates for education as a fundamental human right, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Education plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive, non-discriminatory and peaceful societies: schools are centres of learning, inspiration and growth, and must never be the targets of terrorism and violence.

EI has been closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and lobbying intergovernmental and education donor institutions for the right to teach and to learn and for inclusive quality education, with the support of its two affiliated organisations: the National Teachers Elected Council (NTEC) and the Afghanistan Teacher Support Association (ATSA).

In August 2021, the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan, with severe repercussions on the education system in the country, both in terms of access to the teaching profession for women and men and the right to equal access to education for all, and particularly for girls. The Taliban restricted access to secondary and

higher education for girls and women and prohibited female teachers from teaching boys and male teachers from teaching girls.

As a result of these policies, many teachers, both men and women, have lost their jobs or are currently at risk of losing them. It is estimated that in 2022 alone, 500,000 women² in Afghanistan lost their jobs³.

Another critical issue for teachers in Afghanistan is also their pay. Salaries are extremely low, as many teachers interviewed by EI indicated, and are often barely enough to cover their living expenses. Some teachers said they were not even able to feed their children. Poor wages impact negatively on the wellbeing of teachers and their families, making them extremely vulnerable to economic shocks and at high risk of poverty. This in turn affects the ability of the education system to function and the quality of the education provided.

University education for women has been suspended until further notice, affecting over 100,000 female students. In 2023, UNESCO estimated that 7.8 million children were out of school in the country⁴.

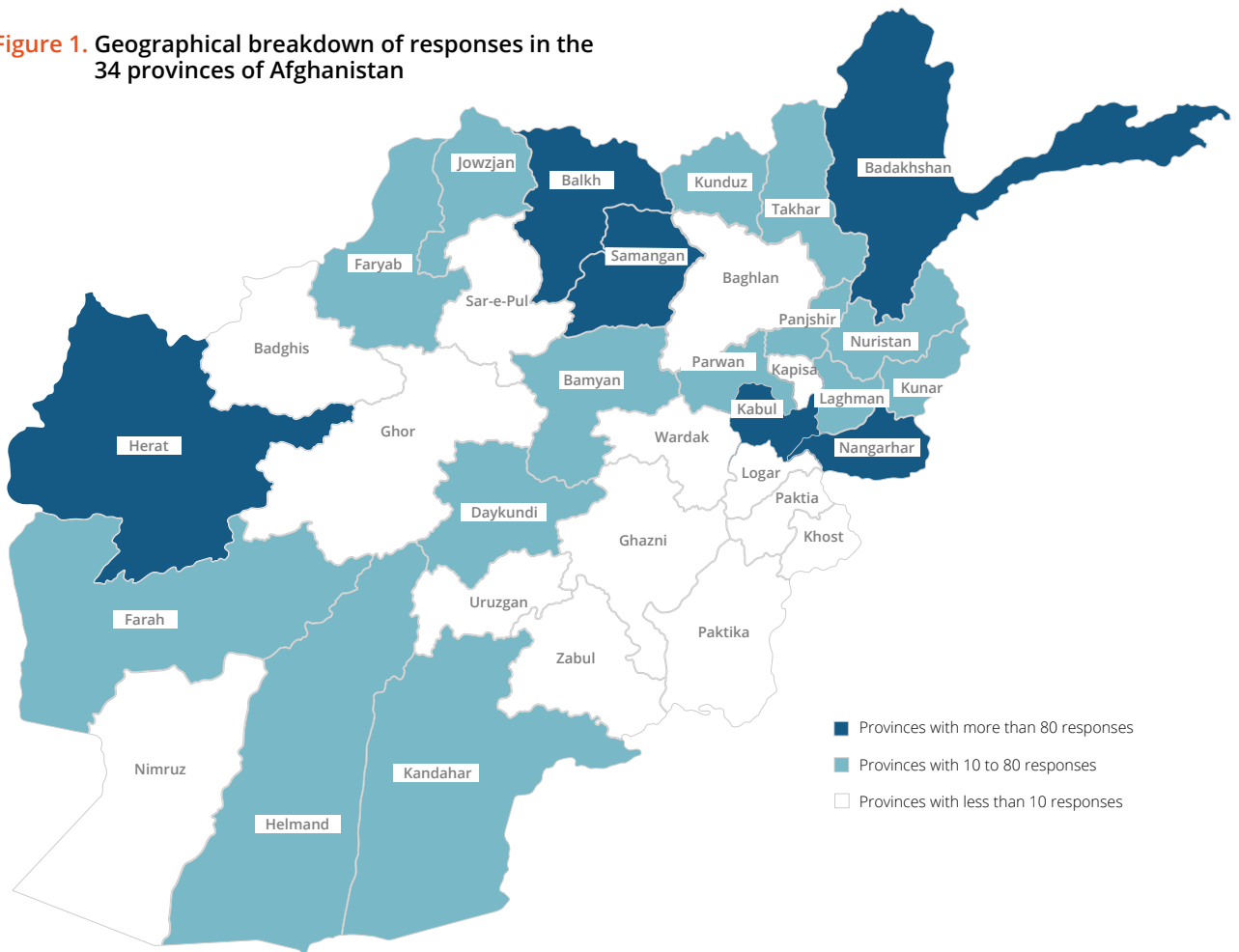
1 Education International is a Global Union Federation that represents organisations of teachers and other education employees. It is the world's largest, most representative global, sectoral organisation of unions with more than 32.5 million trade union members in 384 organisations in 178 countries and territories.

2 Afghanistan: 500,000 jobs lost since Taliban takeover | UN News

3 Education International, <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/28464:afghanistan-survey-provides-meaningful-insights-into-the-experiences-of-teachers-and-students-under-the-taliban-regime>

4 250 million children out-of-school: What you need to know about UNESCO's latest education data | UNESCO

Figure 1. Geographical breakdown of responses in the 34 provinces of Afghanistan



In 2021, EI called on the authorities in Afghanistan to ensure that all learners have equal and unrestricted access to learning in a safe and protective environment; to support teachers by paying their salaries on time and engaging in policy dialogue with teachers' organisations, and to remove all barriers to girls' and women's participation in education.

In 2022, EI started a bold initiative – supported by the Malala Fund – seeking to fill the gaps in the narrative around education in Afghanistan and to give a voice to teachers, presenting their experiences through the [Afghan Teachers' Rights Observatory](https://afghanteachers.org/en), an online platform⁵ sharing information and testimonies

provided by teachers on several key issues. The platform documents and addresses critical aspects such as teachers' pay and working conditions, human and labour rights violations, gender equity – including gender segregation of classes and staff – girls' access to education, access to teaching and learning materials, restrictions on women teachers, safety, and curriculum adherence to international human rights standards. The aim is to better understand the state of the education sector and the right to education in Afghanistan. The Observatory was launched during the Education Cannot Wait High-Level Financing Conference in Geneva.

5 <https://afghanteachers.org/en>

2. EI Survey: Elevating and amplifying the voices of Afghan teachers on the global stage

Following on from the launch of the Observatory, to provide further evidence on the situation and to support policy and advocacy efforts, EI developed an online tool to collect testimonies from Afghan teachers, to elevate and amplify the voice of Afghanistan's teachers on the global stage. The tool was developed to capture the everyday realities of teachers in Afghanistan and used various methods, such as interviews, surveys and testimonies, to document the real-life experiences and challenges faced by both female and male educators on the ground.

The survey was conducted in various provinces⁶, with the support of NTEC focal points, who were equipped with laptops and an internet connection and were trained to interview respondents while safeguarding their privacy and security. The online survey was made available in three languages, Dari, Pashto and English, and included open-ended questions to allow for the collection of qualitative responses.

The interviews were conducted between March and May 2023 in 23 provinces where the NTEC has active representation, and 2517 testimonies were gathered from teachers, of which 1318 were women, representing around 59%, and 904 were men, representing 40% of the respondents. The remaining

1% preferred not to specify their gender. After May 2023, the survey was suspended for security reasons and to avoid potential reprisals against the participants. It was also considered that EI and the NTEC had gathered sufficient material from the over 2,500 responses to provide a valuable insight into the diverse challenges faced by teachers in Afghanistan.

2.1 Geographical scope of the survey

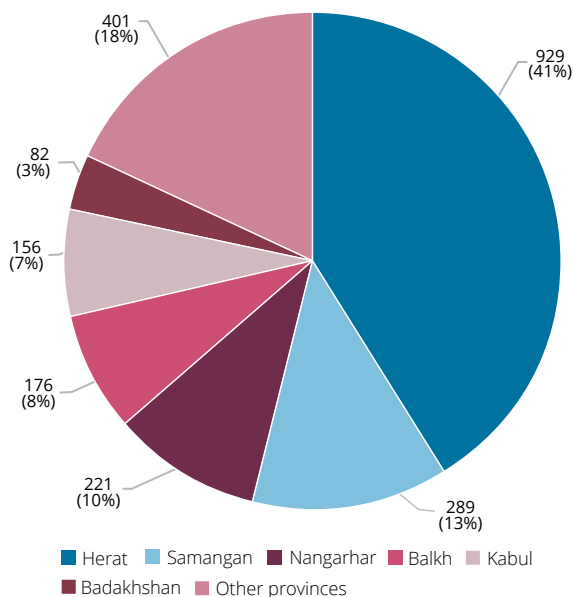
While the data collection process was initiated and conducted in person by the NTEC focal points in 31 provinces, the interviews with female and male teachers were effectively conducted in 23 of those provinces: Badakhshan, Badghis, Balkh, Bamyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Herat, Jowzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, Takhar and Wardak.

In the other nine provinces, primarily in the southeast of the country (Ghazni, Ghor, Logar, Nimruz, Paktia, Paktika, Sar-e Pol, Uruzgan and Zabul), the NTEC colleagues were unable to conduct the interviews for a number of mainly security-related reasons, including harassment, difficult relations with local authorities, fear of prosecution and, in one case, detention (in Logar, the NTEC focal point was detained and fled the country after being released).

6 Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, Jowzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Paktia, Paktika, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, Sar-e Pol, Takhar, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Zabul

The majority of the responses were concentrated in six provinces – as shown in table 1 below – where the survey numbers were remarkably high, constituting 73% of all responses. These provinces include **Herat**, with 929 responses, **Samangan**, with 289 responses, **Nangarhar**, with 221 responses, **Balkh**, with 176 responses, **Kabul**, with 156 responses, and **Badakhshan**, with 82 responses. In all the provinces, except Nangarhar, the female teachers outnumbered the males among the respondents, with 1194 women respondents out of 1853. These provinces are among the most populated in the country and have high numbers of teachers. The NTEC is well-represented in these provinces and has established good relations with the local education departments, which enabled the focal points to safely conduct the interviews with the teachers.

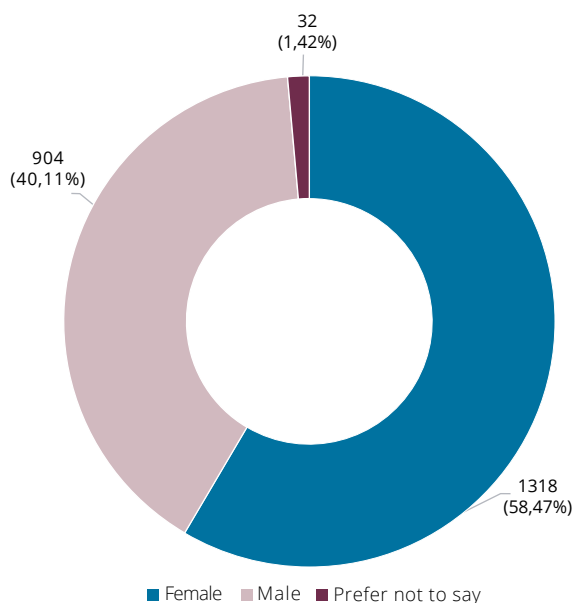
Table 1: Number of respondents per province



2.2 Profile of respondents

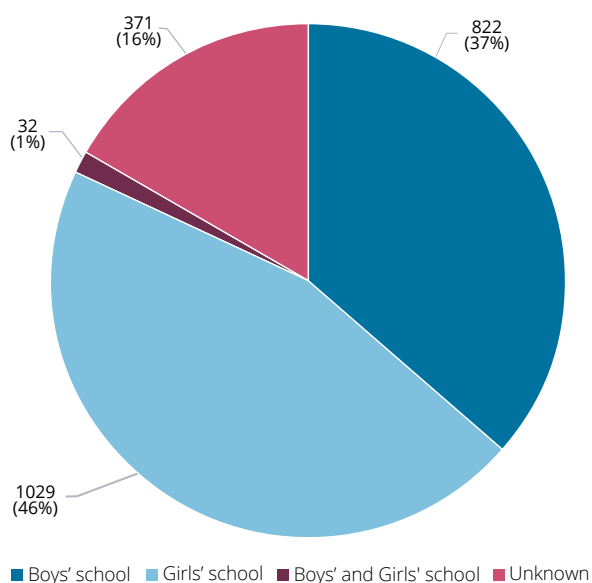
As indicated in the previous section, the majority of the survey respondents were women, constituting almost 60% of the total teachers interviewed and 70% of the respondents in five of the most populated provinces (Herat, Samangan, Balkh, Badakhshan, Kabul), where the survey numbers were higher.

Table 2: Gender of respondents



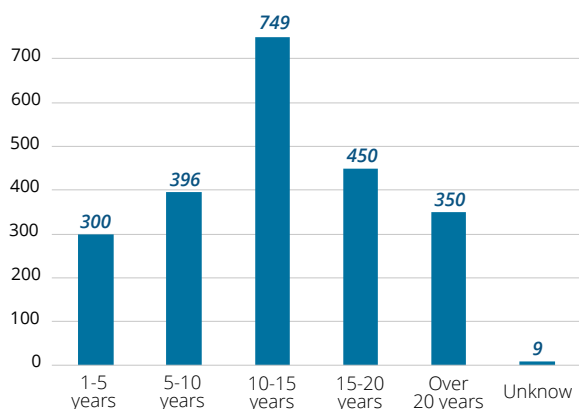
It is also worth highlighting that over 46% of the testimonies came from educators in girls' schools (table 3). Male teachers constituted less than 1% of educators in girls' schools, while women accounted for almost 5% of the workforce in boys' schools, confirming the gender segregation in the teaching profession.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents in single-sex and mixed schools



In terms of years of experiences in the teaching profession, **one third** of all respondents, **predominantly women** (643 women and 377 men), had been teaching for between **10 and 15 years**. Four hundred and fifty teachers, representing around **20%** of the total, and equally divided between women and men, had been teaching for **15 to 20 years**. Three hundred and ninety-six teachers (over 6.5% men and almost 10% women) had **5 to 10 years'** experience in the profession, while 469 respondents (**15%**) had been teaching for **over 20 years** and 426 (**13%**) for **less than 5 years**, with a balanced gender division.

Table 4: Years of teaching experience



More than half of the respondents were therefore teachers with 10 to 20 years' experience, with **women** outnumbering men in the category of **teachers with 10 to 15 years** in the profession and alone constituting around **25% of the total** respondents. At the two opposite extremes, among very experienced teachers and teachers with less than 5 years' experience, there is a greater gender balance.

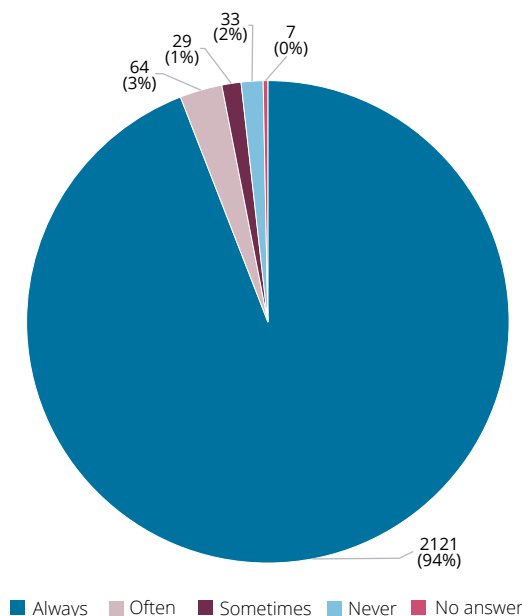
2.3 Fundamental right to learn for girls and to teach for women

One of the main objectives of the survey was to collect qualitative information on the right to education for all, particularly for girls, and the right to teach, following the restrictions imposed by the Taliban. The voices of teachers are crucial to understanding the perceptions of educators and the impact of the measures imposed on teachers and students, male and female.

As shown in the table below, **over 94% of respondents thought that girls had the right to go to school** and that their right to education should be protected and guaranteed. Of this overwhelming

majority, 60% were female teachers and 40% were male teachers. Only 33 respondents – 22 of whom were female teachers – thought that girls should 'never be educated'.

Table 5: Do you think girls have a right to education?



There is, however, evidence from the information collected suggesting that **the question on girls' right to education may have been misunderstood and the answer 'never' may not reflect the actual opinion** of many respondents, in particular female teachers, as when the same respondents were asked further in the survey about their satisfaction with the teaching experience, the explanations they provided contradicted their response to the specific question on girls' right to education. For instance, those answering 'never' included a female primary school teacher from Badakhshan who also responded, *"There is a major problem in schools, one is gender discrimination"*; a female teacher from Herat, who responded, *"In the last few months, with the closure of girls' schools, our hearts*

are burning like a candle for those who are waiting for science and art, and we were not satisfied with what happened to the girls"; a male teacher with over 20 years' experience from Badakhshan, who stressed that "half of society is deprived of literacy"; a very experienced female teacher from Herat, who said, "I am unhappy because the future of our children has been ruined, the schools are closed, the teachers are in confusion", and another teacher who spoke of the "unfortunate conditions of the country, unmeasured restrictions on women". Some of the teachers who replied 'never' also indicated being unhappy because "schools are closed", but this could be linked to the loss of income and not necessarily to the restrictions on girls' education. Still, the testimonies provided are clearly at odds with the response that girls should not be educated.

As highlighted from the testimonies collected during the interviews, denying girls access to secondary education contributes to an overall decline in the education system: both female and male teachers were unhappy with the closure of high schools, which has forced girls from grade seven to twelve to stay at home (as covered in further detail under the section on the teaching experience and working conditions).

In a recent study conducted in Afghanistan, the global affairs think tank [ODI](#) revealed that "families are increasingly marrying off their girls to cope with closures of education and employment opportunities – driven also by fear of forced marriage to Taliban leaders". ODI indicates that "before the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, there was growing acceptance of girls not marrying until they were over 18. Our data suggests this norms shift was gaining traction, particularly among young women

with at least a secondary education. (...) The lack of opportunities for education and employment that granted women and girls more autonomy around decisions regarding marriage is impacting social norms in Afghanistan. (...) Without economic or educational prospects, families face a real dilemma. A climate of insecurity fuels fears that unmarried daughters will be forcibly married to Taliban members. This is leading families to marry off their daughters below a preferred age as a way to protect them from this fate."⁷

In the aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August 2021, one of the most critical restrictions imposed on teachers has been the barriers to women teaching boys, as already highlighted in the introductory section, with a consequent loss of jobs for many of them. The prohibition on women teaching boys not only affects their right to work and their economic security but is also detrimental to boys. A study⁸ by Human Right Watch (HRW), conducted in 34 provinces, highlights the alarming deterioration in boys' access to education and in the quality of their education. In many instances, women teachers have been replaced by unqualified male teachers or by no teacher at all. The research also underlines an increase in corporal punishment and an ongoing revision of curricula, promoting discrimination. As a result, many boys choose to leave school, unable to cope with the stress and anxiety and the increasing pressure created by the

⁷ *Changing social norms around age of marriage in Afghanistan: data on repression and resistance under the Taliban*, ODI, 2024, available online at the following link : <https://dropsafghanistan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Changing-Norms-Afghanistan-full-report-ODI-DROPS.pdf>

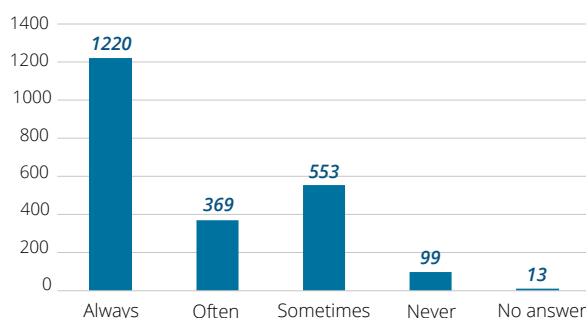
⁸ *School are Failing Boys too*, Human Rights Watch: 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/06/schools-are-failing-boys-too/talibans-impact-boys-educationafghanistan#:~:text=Many%20boys%20were%20previously%20taught,sometimes%20no%20teachers%20at%20all.>

economic and humanitarian situation in the country. Those who still attend school are often in classes with few other students and, in some instances, no teachers.

When asked whether they believed that **women should be able to teach in boys' secondary schools**, the majority of the teachers surveyed by EI, about **53%** (31% women and 22% men), as shown in table 6 below (1,220 respondents, including almost 500 from Herat province), **responded 'always'**. Around 24% of teachers (15% women and 9% men) responded 'sometimes', and around 16% (10% women and 6% men) replied 'often'.

A total of 99 respondents, 63 male and 33 female teachers – a minority constituting less than 4% of the respondents – were of the opinion that women should not teach in boys' secondary schools; the majority – 41 teachers – were from Herat, 7 (all men) were from Badakhshan, Daykundi and Faryab, 5 were from Balkh, Bamyan, Farah and Kunduz (all men), 3 (2 female) were from Badghis and Samangan, and 2 were from Kabul. The female teachers who responded that women should not teach in boys' secondary schools were mainly from Herat, followed by Daykundi and Badakhshan, and were quite experienced, having been teaching between 10 and 20 years or more. **No female teachers with less than 10 years' experience responded that women should not be able to teach in boys' secondary schools.** This data suggests that the younger generation of female teachers seems to be less conservative and more open to cultural change aimed at promoting equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Table 6: Do you believe women teachers should be able to teach in boys' secondary schools?

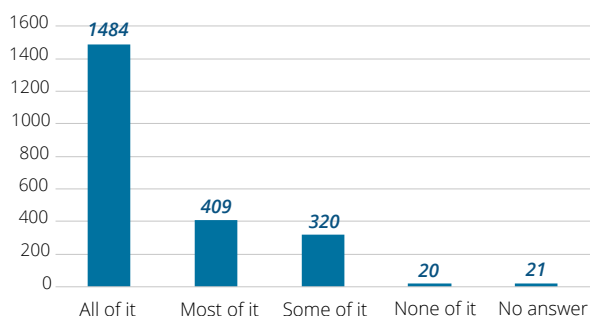


It also emerged from various testimonies that a number of experienced teachers have left the country, and we can conjecture that this could be the result of the restrictions imposed on teaching, in addition to the poor pay, which – as highlighted in the following section on wages – is not allowing teachers to meet their daily needs and to support their families.

2.4 Wages

While low pay was indicated by the majority of female and male teachers as the main source of dissatisfaction when they were asked if they were happy with the teaching experience, it is interesting to note that the majority of them – over 80% – said that they had received their full salary (1484 respondents, around 65% of the total) or most of it (409 respondents, equally divided between women and men, representing 16% of the total) during the 12 months prior to the interviews (conducted in March-May 2023), as shown in table 7 below. Only 20 teachers (13 women and 7 men) said they had not received any pay during the last 12 months.

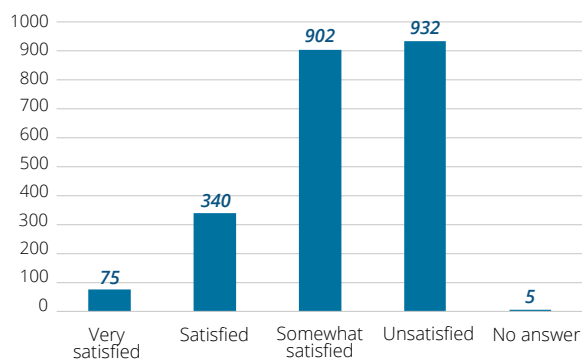
Table 7: Salary received during the last 12 months



This information suggests that **salaries, although low, were paid quite regularly and in full in the main.** This is confirmed by some of the testimonies, from men in particular, indicating that one of the few reasons for satisfaction with the teaching experience in the last twelve months is the fact that *“salaries, although small, are paid regularly every month, so some degree of security is provided”*. At the same time, male teachers transferred to boys’ secondary schools due to the closure of girls’ schools said they had experienced a reduction in their salaries and difficulties receiving them from banks.

Teachers were also asked to express their views regarding their pay in relation to the value of their work and the majority – almost 60% of respondents, equally divided between men and women – said they were not satisfied, as shown in table 8 below, with how teachers’ salaries reflect the amount of work they do: around 36% said they were somewhat satisfied (902 teachers), 13.5% said they were satisfied (340 teachers) and 3% said they were very satisfied (75 teachers). These responses seem to be at odds with the responses by an overwhelming majority of teachers that low pay is one of the main reasons for dissatisfaction with the working conditions in the teaching profession – as highlighted in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

Table 8: How satisfied are you that teachers’ salaries reflect the amount of work you do?



Still, 932 teachers said they were **unsatisfied with the salary received**, representing some **40%** of the total respondents, almost equally divided between men (18%) and women (22%). The Taliban policies have led to a loss of income for the women who used to teach in secondary schools and reduced incomes for the men who used to work in girls’ high schools.

Although the teachers were not specifically asked to indicate their exact salaries, the information can be deduced from the testimonies collected. A male teacher in a boys’ school in Kabul indicated that, in general, the salary ranges from a minimum of 7,000 to a maximum of 10,000 afghani (AFN), the equivalent of €90 to €130 a month. Other teachers said they received a salary of AFN 8,000 to AFN 9,000 (€103 to €116), which they highlighted is not enough to cover their living expenses. To provide an example, one teacher indicated that he spends 7,000 AFN on transport costs alone, to refuel his motorcycle, which is almost his entire salary. Other respondents said that their salary barely covers 40% of their living expenses: one male teacher from Herat said he had fallen into debt as his salary was not enough and he had been forced to borrow money to be able to support his family. A number of respondents

also said that the low income meant that some teachers were unable to buy enough food for their families and their children were suffering from malnutrition.

According to the testimonies collected, teachers are also of the opinion that the lack of decent pay is proof of the little value society attributes to the teaching profession (see sections 2.5 and 2.6 for further analysis).

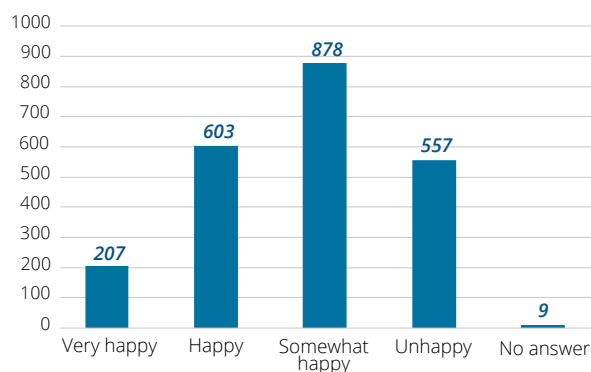
2.5 Satisfaction with the teaching experience and working conditions

An important aspect of the survey relates to teachers' satisfaction with the teaching experience and their working conditions.

The survey reveals that satisfaction with the teaching experience is relatively low, as only **10%** of respondents (6.5% women and 3.50 % men) said they were **very happy** and 603 teachers – around **26%** (14% men and 12% women) – said they were **happy** in this respect. **37%** of teachers (878 respondents, 16% men and 21% women) – considered themselves **somewhat happy** with their experience of working as teachers in the 12 months before the interview was conducted.

Out of 2517 respondents, 557 teachers, around **24%** of the total, most of whom were women – 403 relative to 144 men – indicated they were **unhappy** with the situation, as shown in the table below.

Table 9: Satisfaction with the teaching experience



If we also consider the respondents' years of experience in the teaching profession, it is interesting to note that **most of the very experienced teachers, with over twenty years in the profession, said they were happy, very happy** (135 respondents, of which 50 women) **or somewhat happy** (127 teachers, equally divided between the two sexes) with their experiences of working as teachers. The number of respondents saying they were **unhappy** was only 88 – mainly female teachers (80 women, 8 men) from the provinces of Herat, Kabul, Samangan and Badakhshan, in decreasing order.

Most of these teachers were **not happy** with the closure of girls' secondary schools and the consequent denial of the right to education and the right to work for women. Some female teachers indicated that they had not been able to teach during the last year. Many respondents also complained about the low pay not being enough to support their families' needs.

There is clearly a **gender imbalance in the level of satisfaction with the teaching experience among very experienced teachers**: most of those who said they were not satisfied were women teaching in girls' schools while

only a few male teachers responded that they were unhappy, and expressed concern over the closures of girls' schools. The majority of experienced male teachers responded that they were happy or very happy, often without providing an explanation for their answers.

Among the **teachers with five to ten years' experience**, the level of satisfaction with the teaching experience did not differ much from that of the most experienced teachers. Also in this case, the majority of respondents said they were happy or very happy (163 teachers: 93 women and 68 men, a lower gender divide compared to the senior teachers' category); about the same number of respondents, 159, the majority women (92), said they were somewhat happy, while only 74 teachers (53 women and 21 men), mainly from Herat, but also from other provinces such as Nuristan, Bayman, Daykundi, Balkh, Samangan and, to some extent, Kabul, indicated they were unhappy.

Again, those who expressed unhappiness over the closure of girls' schools were mainly women from Herat. The testimonies from male teachers in this category indicate that their level of awareness in terms of the denial of women's and girls' rights to education is higher than that of the most experienced male teachers. The information collected suggests that this generation of male teachers seems to be more sensitive to the conditions of their female counterparts. Indeed, the gender divide among female and male teachers with five to ten years in the profession who responded that they were unhappy is much lower than among the experienced teachers.

The reasons for their unhappiness again included the low pay and the conditions in schools, but also the lack of regard for the teaching profession and the lack of value attributed to it in terms of monetary reward. As a male teacher from Daykundi commented, it is a profession with *"high responsibility and expectations but very little encouragement and payment"*.

As regards the **less experienced teachers, with under 5 years in the profession**, a more balanced picture can be observed from the answers provided. The respondents who said they were unhappy were also a minority (67) in this case, however, for the first time, the number of women and men – 30 and 33 – was almost equal, and the men slightly outnumbered the women. The difference with teachers in the previous categories who said they were happy or very happy is also smaller – in this case 108 respondents (74 female and 34 male teachers), while the teachers with five to ten years' experience expressing satisfaction were more than double those saying they were unhappy. The number of respondents with under 5 years in the profession who said they were somewhat happy constituted the majority (124 teachers, of whom 82 female).

Their reasons for being unhappy or somewhat happy were in line with the motivations analysed so far. The main focus among younger teachers, however, was the quality of education and the conditions in schools, including teachers' working conditions. *"Teaching facilities are limited, salaries are low, teachers' problems are not taken care of."* Also, those who responded that they were somewhat happy still pointed out that teachers' long hours reduce the quality of teaching, and a male primary school teacher from Herat complained about the *"closure of female schools for older*

girls, gender discrimination, disrespect for women's rights, lack of peace of mind, non-adjustment of teachers' teaching hours and hundreds of other inappropriate behaviours during the republic and now."

The last and largest category of **teachers**, comprising about half of the total respondents, are those with medium to senior levels of experience, ranging **from 10 to 20 years**. The level of satisfaction with the teaching experience among teachers with 10 to 20 years in the profession seems to be quite balanced between those who were happy or very happy (400), those who were **unhappy (327 respondents, with a significant gender divide and women representing the overwhelming majority – 327 compared with 82 men)**, and the teachers who were somewhat happy (327, with very little difference between men and women – 214 relative to 248).

The majority of the teachers who said they were **happy or very happy** were largely from the northwest provinces of Herat, Balkh, Samangan and Nangarhar, and were **equally divided between men (198) and women (202)**. The reasons provided for this satisfaction included the teaching programme and the students' good results, as indicated by a secondary school male teacher from Balkh, with 15 to 20 years' experience: *"We started our work programme according to the plan and programme of the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education and the School Administration and Educational Quorum. We are happy that we achieved the goals we had and achieved satisfactory results."* A female teacher with 10 to 15 years' experience in a girls' school in Samangan also commented: *"I am*

happy that I am teaching in this situation. My major is English. When I go to school, my students are very eager to learn. My effort is to be able to make my lessons in the minds of the students. My experience is that girls are enthusiastic and interested in lessons. Enlightening students' minds and their bright future." This confirms that one of the main sources of satisfaction is the value of the teaching profession perceived as a "sacred duty".

However, the sense of duty felt by many teachers often stands in contrast with the frustration of many others who feel their work is not sufficiently valued, especially in terms of remuneration, as previously highlighted. *"In Afghan society, teachers are not valued much because the poorest class of society are teachers. It is almost embarrassing to introduce children as the children of teachers,"* said a male teacher with 10 to 15 years' experience from a boys' school in Kabul.

The level of unhappiness among teachers with 10 to 15 years' experience is also the highest if compared with the previous data for very experienced and less experienced teachers: almost one third of respondents, predominantly women, complained about the closure of girls' schools as the main source of dissatisfaction with the teaching experience. Women secondary school teachers from the major cities like Kabul showed a particularly high level of awareness of gender discrimination and inequalities. They clearly indicated the "violation of women and girls' rights (to education/work)" as a critical issue to address, as many women who used to teach in secondary schools are not able to work anymore. *"They don't let me go to school. I go to school, but I don't have teaching hours, and thousands of other*

problems,” said a female teacher from a girls’ school in Kabul.

To summarise, the data from all categories of teachers confirms that it is largely women who are unhappy with the teaching experience, mostly due to the closure of girls’ secondary schools. There is, however, a significant divide among women themselves, as those with over twenty years’ experience in the teaching profession expressed a higher level of satisfaction than their female colleagues who are at the beginning or in the middle of their careers. This would indicate that young and intermediate generations of female teachers seem to suffer more from the restrictions imposed by the Taliban and to be personally affected by – as well as more aware of – the negative outcomes of these discriminatory policies and practices.

It is also important to stress that among the teachers who responded that they were very happy or happy there is often a discrepancy between the answers and the additional information provided to explain the response.

Although teachers indicated they were satisfied with the teaching experience, they often also expressed dissatisfaction when asked to expand on their answer.

“I am happy to be of service to society but, unfortunately, I am sad that I am causing my own children to be resentful because I cannot fend for myself economically and financially with my low income,” said a female primary school teacher from Herat, highlighting the need to receive decent pay. Many more teachers, despite responding that they were happy or very happy, spoke of various problems. *“I am deeply affected by the fact that girls’ schools have been closed and their right to education has been taken away, and I*

am relatively happy that salaries are being paid,” said a female secondary girl’s school-teacher from Samagan. Similarly, a male teacher at a boys’ secondary school in Herat said,

“I am happy because being a teacher is a sacred duty. But it comes with a small and insignificant income due to economic problems, which does not meet the minimum expenses of my family and myself and has negative effects on the soul and spirit.”

It is worth highlighting these aspects, as it shows that many respondents who said they were satisfied with their experience working as teachers were not fully happy and were able to identify key problems affecting teachers – such as low pay – and the education system as whole, including the right of women to teach and the right of girls to learn.

Overall, the respondents who expressed satisfaction were mainly male teachers working in boys’ schools and the reasons for this satisfaction related in particular to an **improvement in security conditions** in the country and to the fact that, as mentioned in the section about wages, although **salaries are low, they are paid regularly**, so *“some degree of security is provided”*, as one teacher said.

The male teachers who indicated that they were happy or somewhat happy still pointed out that the situation in terms of girls’ education *“is not good, as girls’ schools have been closed”*. Furthermore, the lack of interest in school and the economic

problems of students and teachers were reported as additional reasons for unhappiness. A secondary school male teacher from Balkh indicated that education is declining under the current situation in Afghanistan, as *“there are no textbooks, female teachers are at home, girls from classes seven to twelve are at home, the salary of teachers is very small and a number of experienced teachers have left the country”*.

Female teachers who said they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied

were motivated by their **religious faith and their interest in the teaching profession**, as their job is seen as *“a sacred duty”*: they are happy to support children and see the good results achieved by some of the students, who make them proud as teachers. A secondary school teacher from Balkh also indicated that, *“in a situation where there is widespread poverty and unemployment in the country, at least we are able to work, have a small income and salaries are paid on time”*.

As another male teacher highlighted, *“Our physical security is provided for. We have to be satisfied.”* This information suggests that, although a minority, not all female and male teachers are opposed to the Taliban regime. Even if they are not fully supportive, they are still able to recognise some positive aspects, such as the regular payment of salaries and an improvement in the security conditions in the country.

Meanwhile, the majority of respondents, both women and men, **who were not happy or satisfied** with the teaching experience, spoke in particular of the **inability to meet basic economic needs**: *“The salary that teachers receive is not enough to live on”*; and the **denial of girls’ right to education**: *“High school girls are not allowed to study”*. A male teacher in Kabul indicated that girls’

schools above the sixth grade are closed. The closure of girls’ secondary schools also leads to reduced salaries and job losses for teachers, as some respondents highlighted. A woman teacher from Herat, who used to teach in secondary schools or classes for older girls, reported that she had been at home for two years. This not only has a negative impact on her income but also on her mental wellbeing, as not being able to teach makes her extremely unhappy.

The closure of girls’ secondary schools has a direct impact not only on girls’ access to education and teachers’ access to jobs and incomes but also on society at large. As several female and male teachers said in their testimonies, restrictions in terms of girls’ education are seen as causing **“backwardness”** in Afghan society, lowering the level of literacy, science and knowledge, which are the basis for progress and development and inclusive social and economic growth, leaving no one behind.

“Girls are the foundation of society, but they are now at home. The destruction of society starts with the obstacles to the education of the young generation,”

said a woman teacher from a girls’ school in Kabul.

Gender inequalities and discrimination against women and girls in education and employment are not only violations of basic human rights but they also hamper the development of society as a whole, *“because we know that half of society is made up of women”*, said a woman teacher from Kabul, and *“50% of people dropping out*

of education slows down the progress of a country in all areas”.

Women respondents who teach in girls’ schools showed a greater level of awareness of gender equality and women’s rights,

mentioning the word ‘patriarchy’ among the reasons for unhappiness with their teaching conditions and asking, as a female teacher from Herat said, *“How can they be satisfied when the **right to education, the right to study and the right to work have been taken away from women?**”* In line with this, a woman teacher from a girls’ school in Kabul stated:

“We do not have a good social and educational life, our daughters have to stay at home, we are not allowed to be educated and we are not allowed to exercise our legal rights.”

Another woman teacher from Badakhshan with over twenty years’ experience in girls’ schools defined the Taliban as *“the enemy of the women’s class, with the restrictions being increased day by day”*, pointing to the restrictions imposed on women by the Taliban regime as a major source of gender inequalities and discrimination against women in the country.

Other reasons given for unhappiness with the teaching experience included the **conditions in schools** – *“rooms are dark and cold”* – ranging from the scarcity of classrooms, few seats for students, the lack of drinking water and teaching materials or the long distances from home for both teachers and students. Male teachers who have been transferred from girls’ to boys’ high schools indicated

that the new schools are often far away from the previous ones, causing several problems, including the potential inability to arrive on time. Some teachers also expressed frustration with school administrators, who are not always responsive or able to solve problems.

It is clear from the testimonies collected that many schools in Afghanistan are in a critical state, lacking basic items such as chairs and tables, classrooms, electricity, water and sanitation facilities. Some teachers said that working in such poor conditions is preventing them from performing at their best, as they feel demotivated; they indicated this **lack of motivation can also be observed among students**, for the same reasons.

Only one woman primary school teacher from Herat indicated that she was satisfied with her school: *“All the facilities are available for the students. A good educational system is available to us. The educational system is new.”*

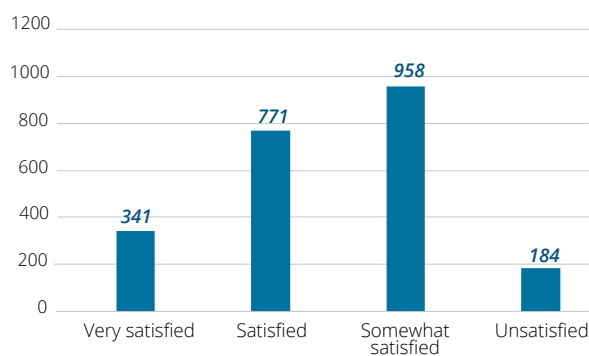
Satisfaction with the teaching experience is inextricably linked with satisfaction with the **working conditions**. Surprisingly, both female and male teachers responded that they were relatively satisfied with the working conditions in their schools, as shown in table 10 below. Most respondents, almost **42%** (over 17% men and around 24.5% women), responded that they were **‘somewhat satisfied’**. Around 18% of the women and 14% of the men interviewed, for a total of **32%**, said they were **satisfied** while almost **15%** of the teachers (10% women and 5% men), said they were **very satisfied** with their working conditions. It is worth noting that women expressed a higher degree of satisfaction than men and that only 184 respondents, representing **8%** of the total (with a slightly higher percentage of women, 4.66% compared with

3.24% of men), indicated that they were **unsatisfied**.

In terms of provinces, more than half (101) of the respondents who expressed a negative opinion on working conditions were from Herat province and the rest were also from the provinces with higher numbers of respondents, such as Badakhshan, Samangan, Balkh, Kabul and a few from Daykundi.

It is interesting to note that of the different categories of teachers who said they were unsatisfied with working conditions, the majority – not in absolute terms but in comparison with the proportion of teachers in each category – was constituted by the younger teachers with less than 5 years' experience, and the number of men was twice that of women.

Table 10: Satisfaction with working conditions



As regards the respondents who said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their working conditions, the numbers reflect the proportion of teachers in each 'years of experience' category, as well as in terms of gender: the majority were teachers with 10 to 20 years' experience (229 men and 316 women), followed by teachers with less than 10 years' experience (219 women and 128 men) and senior teachers with over 20 years' experience (202, of which 80 men and

122 women). The numbers in terms of geographical origin are also proportional to the number of respondents for each province (Herat 393, Samangan 168, Balkh 110, Kabul 44, Badakhshan 37).

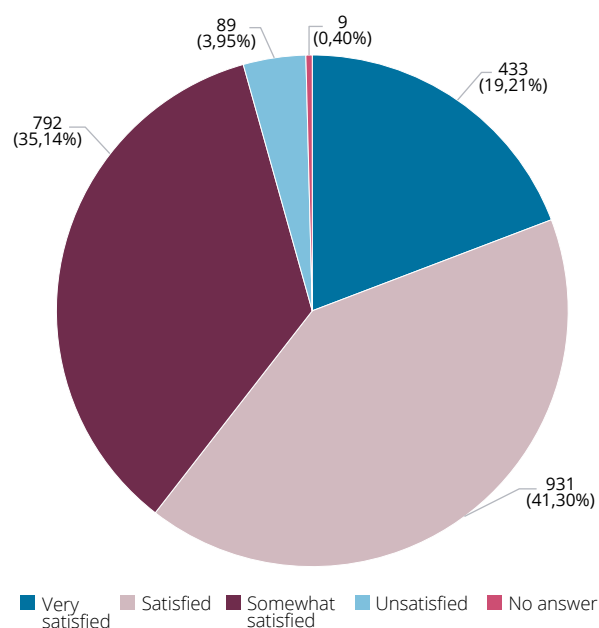
It should be underlined that the outcomes of the question on working conditions seem to be inconsistent with the low level of satisfaction teachers expressed when asked about their experience of working in education. No explanation can be given for this discrepancy, as the respondents were not asked to provide reasons/explanations for their answers to this particular question.

Teachers were, however, asked what would make their jobs more satisfying and were provided with some options. The majority of respondents, almost 20%, indicated **better basic pay**, confirming that salary is one of the key issues for teachers to be able to meet their basic needs and cover their living expenses, including feeding their families. In addition to fair wages, around 8% of the teachers said they would like to have a better balance between responsibilities and rights, followed by almost 6% of respondents stating that they would like to have better working conditions and job security. Other responses with percentages below 5%, and ranging from 1.5% to 4.5%, included a safe working environment, quality training and professional development for teachers, the right to join a union and for the union to have a legal right to negotiate, fair promotion prospects, professional freedom, participation in education and decision making, and social security.

Teachers were also asked whether they were satisfied with the curriculum they teach. The information collected reveals that the majority, 41.3% of respondents

(23% female teachers and 18% male), responded that they were satisfied, and over 19% very satisfied. Around 35% of the teachers were 'somewhat satisfied', with a higher gender divide (around 22% women and 13% men) compared with the other responses where the degree of satisfaction among women and men teachers was pretty much equal.

Table 11: Satisfaction with the curriculum



This suggests that the majority of teachers did not seem to be particularly aware of any changes in the curriculum that might negatively affect the quality of the education provided, as only 3.95% of respondents, almost equally divided between men and women, indicated that they were unsatisfied with the curriculum they teach.

If we look at the years of experience among the teachers who expressed dissatisfaction, only one male teacher from Herat with over 20 years' experience responded that he was unsatisfied, while 14 teachers – of which 8 women – with less than 10 years of experience and

12 teachers (4 women and 8 men) with experience between 10 and 20 years indicated that they were unhappy with the content of the curriculum.

It is important to highlight, however, that after the interviews were conducted – May 2023 – the curriculum underwent significant changes. The responses to the survey might now therefore be different with regard to the content of the current curriculum. In fact, a recent report published in December 2023 by Human Rights Watch (HRW)⁹ indicates that under the Taliban regime some subjects defined 'anti-Islamic', like arts, sport or civics, have been removed. A document acquired by HRW, the authenticity of which could not be confirmed, outlined certain alterations observed in schools. According to the document, the previous Afghan curriculum was criticised for adopting "un-Islamic and non-Afghan standards resembling Western norms". It raised concerns about the curriculum endorsing Western values and attire, advocating for democracy, addressing other religions and introducing students to non-Muslim authors, such as Shakespeare. It is not, perhaps, therefore surprising that the teachers interviewed by EI were happy with the curriculum at that point, as progress had been made in terms of its quality and content under the previous Afghan government.

2.6 Teacher status: the value of teaching in Afghan society

An important aspect of the survey was how Afghan society is perceived to value the teaching profession. The findings of the research, as indicated in table 12 below, reveal that the total proportion

⁹ Ibid. *School are Failing Boys too*, Human Rights Watch, 2023

of both male and female teachers who felt that the teaching profession had never been held in high regard was over 16% (381 respondents). The majority were female teachers, with over 11% feeling their profession was not valued, as compared with only 5% of men. There is here a clear gender division in the perception of how society values the teaching profession. Almost 39% (959) of all the respondents answered 'sometimes', while 38% responded that the teaching profession was always or mostly held in high regard (451 answered 'always' and 457 'mostly', with an equal gender balance). If we look at the female and male teachers who said they felt the teaching profession had always been valued by society, the proportion is just 18%, almost equally divided between men and women.

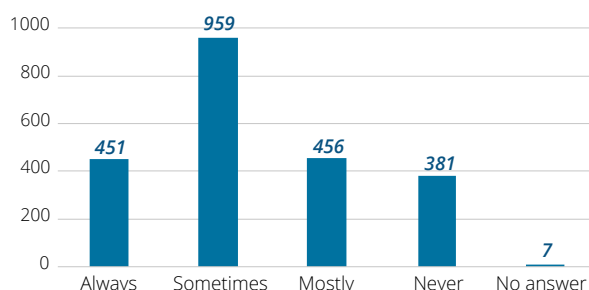
If we deepen the analysis, examining the responses by years of experience in the teaching profession, the data shows a quite homogeneous picture across the different categories of teachers who said they felt their profession was valued. Among those who considered that teaching was always or mostly held in high regard, 161 respondents (99 men and 62 female teachers) had over 20 years' experience, 252 (148 female) had 1 to 10 years' experience and 489 (220 female) had 10 to 20 years' experience. Considering the last two categories correspond to the majority of teachers, in proportional terms, there is an equal balance among the teachers with different levels of experience.

The same can be said for the respondents who answered 'sometimes', where there is no major imbalance in the responses of the different categories of teachers. There is, however, a notable divide in terms of gender, with women outnumbering men in all categories: 217 women out

of 334 teachers with 1 to 10 years of experience, 310 female teachers out of 457 respondents with 10 to 20 years of experience and 101 women out of 148 teachers with over 20 years of experience said that teaching was sometimes held in high regard.

A major divide can be observed both in terms of the years of experience and the gender of the respondents who said that **teaching was never held in high regard by society**. Those expressing this negative perception were mostly **women with 10 to 20 years' experience in the profession** (161 female teachers and 63 male colleagues, for a total of 230 respondents). This data is particularly striking if compared with the number of teachers with over twenty years' experience who gave the same response: only 40 respondents, of which the majority, 33, were women. Among teachers with less experience, one to ten years, 109 respondents (49 men and 60 women) felt teaching was not valued in Afghan society. Teachers with 10 to 20 years' experience also constituted the majority of those who responded that they were unhappy with the teaching experience and the working conditions.

Table 12: Do you believe that Afghan society holds teachers in high regard?



As indicated in the previous sections on wages and satisfaction with the teaching experience and working conditions,

for some respondents, the low pay and benefits granted to the teaching profession are a reflection of society's low regard for it.

Regard for the teaching profession is a critical issue not only in Afghanistan but globally. The education sector is part of what is defined as the care economy – referring to all economic activities involving people and requiring an element of care – which also includes work in the health and domestic sectors.

The jobs in these sectors are largely performed by women, which is why they are often undervalued in society, as they are associated with the unpaid care work mostly carried out by women in the household. Jobs in the care sector are also seen as 'non productive' and less valuable, hence deserving lower pay.

As highlighted by the ILO, care work across the world is characterised by a lack of benefits and protections, low pay or non remuneration, and exposure to physical, mental and, in some cases, sexual harm. Gender discrimination explains why the care sector, including the teaching profession, is less valued than other sectors that are considered 'productive', such as the STEM jobs, predominantly performed by men and characterised by higher employment and salary returns.

In line with the ILO Conventions on non-discrimination and equal pay in employment and occupation, it is crucial to promote the concept of equal pay for work of equal value in professions and sectors which are not fairly valued – and hence paid – in society, such as the teaching profession. Sectoral unions play a key role in this regard, negotiating better pay and working conditions for

teachers and the profession through collective bargaining.

2.7 Labour rights

A key area the research aims to investigate is labour rights and, in particular, freedom of association and the freedom for education unions to operate in the country, to help workers negotiate and protect their rights.

Under the previous government, Afghanistan had embarked on a series of labour legislation reforms aimed at complying with ILO standards and promoting workers' rights in line with the principles enshrined in the ILO Conventions ratified by Afghanistan. The ILO provided technical assistance to reform the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled and improve its capacity to provide services to workers and employers, with a special focus on improving the application of labour laws and building the country's capacity to ratify international labour standards and to work together with social partners to apply them.

Afghanistan has ratified ILO Conventions 100 and 111 on equal pay and non-discrimination in employment and occupation and the Conventions on forced labour, child labour and minimum age. It has not, however, ratified the fundamental ILO Conventions on freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining, occupational safety and health and ILO Convention 190, adopted in 2019, on violence and harassment in the world of work.

The ILO also supported the creation of a tripartite consultative mechanism for social dialogue on the labour law

reform process, so that both workers and employers could play an active role in policy formulation.

As for social dialogue and the involvement of social partners, although the trade unions have a history dating back to 1967, their activities were curtailed during Taliban rule. The National Union of Afghan Workers and Employees (NUAWE) and the Central Council of Labour Unions of Afghanistan (CCLUA) operate as ILO constituents in the country. Despite the right of workers to join unions being guaranteed by Article 147 of the Labour Law, unions face operational constraints and have limited outreach among workers. The NUAWE is the largest trade union in Afghanistan, with approximately 160,000 members, constituting around 1.5% of the labour force.

On specific labour rights for workers in the public and private sector, the latest available data from the ILO in terms of working conditions indicates that the standard working week is currently set at 40 hours. Adjustments are, however, made for certain categories: 35 hours for young workers aged 15 to 18 and pregnant women, and 30 hours for employees engaged in underground work or working in conditions detrimental to health.

As per the Labour Law, the pension age is set at 65. Employers have the option to extend the working period for up to five additional years with the employee's consent. Moreover, special retirement schemes are in place for workers involved in strenuous labour.

All employers are required to provide employees with an employment contract, whether for a definite or indefinite period. These contracts must adhere

to the specific conditions outlined in the Afghan Labour Law, including legitimacy, the scope of the work, absence of legal barriers, pay and benefit details, working hours, leave entitlements, workplace designation, contract duration and signing date. Contracts for a definite period are typically set for one year but can be extended upon mutual agreement. If no action is taken upon the contract's termination, it is automatically renewed with the same terms and conditions.

Afghanistan has also established a minimum wage: AFN 5,000 (€64.50) per month in the public sector and AFN 5,500 (€71) for non-permanent private sector workers. The average wage is AFN 11,857 (approximately €153), according to the Asia Foundation's 2017 Afghan Survey Report, but it is lower for teachers – who barely exceed the minimum wage.

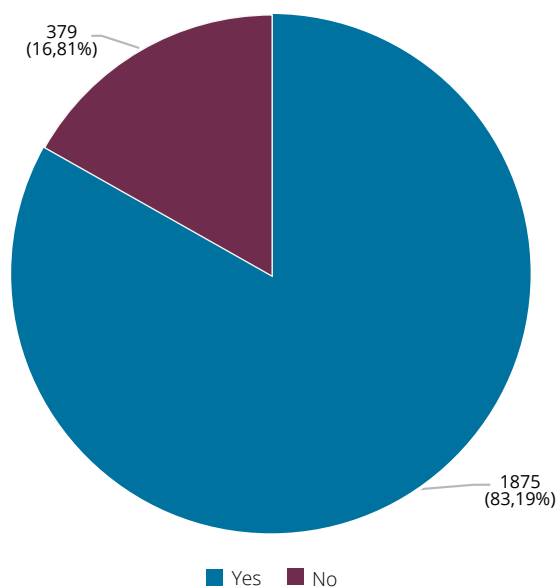
As regards social security contributions, currently, there is no social security scheme in Afghanistan, hence no contributions are required from employers or employees. Under the Education International survey, teachers were asked if they felt that their labour rights were respected in the school where they worked. They were provided with different options, such as whether they had the right to join a professional association or education union, the right to negotiate on all professional matters, the right to professional autonomy/freedom and, in the case that they were union members, whether they knew that the union was able to negotiate status and working conditions on behalf of teachers.

From the information collected, over 20% of the respondents who were union members felt confident about the ability and capacity of the union to represent teachers' interests and negotiate working

conditions on their behalf. Some of these respondents were high level representatives of the local and national Afghan Teachers' Council. Over 30% of the teachers also confirmed that they had the right to join a professional association or education union; around 5% of respondents felt they were able to negotiate on all professional matters and that they had the right to professional autonomy/freedom in the schools where they worked.

The survey also looked at the level of unionisation among respondents and found that **the number of both women and men who were union members was quite high, over 83%** of the respondents – as the table below shows – with **women being more unionised than men** – 1108 (almost 50%) women compared with 740 men (33%). However, given the methodology used by EI- the survey was conducted by the affiliate Union NTEC which also identified respondents to interview- this percentage may be higher and not representative of the teacher workforce at large.

Table 13: Do you belong to a teachers' union?



In terms of level of experience, the majority of unionised teachers fell in the 10 to 20 years' experience category, which is normal, as they constitute almost half of the total respondents, as previously indicated: over 1000 teachers, of which 607 women and 408 men, were union members. Around 310 respondents, almost equally divided between men and women (168 female and 141 male) were teachers with over 20 years' experience, and a total of 519 teachers (332 female and 187 male) who were union members had 1 to 10 years of experience in the teaching profession.

Teachers with less than ten years' experience were, proportionally, the least unionised category, with 168 respondents (72 female and 93 male teachers), predominantly from Herat province, followed by Balkh, Samangan, Farath and a few respondents from Kabul. By contrast, the number of non-union members among experienced male and particularly female teachers was low (2 female and 11 male teachers). A more equal gender balance was registered among non-unionised teachers with 10 to 20 years' experience (81 men and 88 women).

We found no evidence in our analysis that the teachers not joining unions were the most conservative, e.g. those who believed that girls should not go to school or that women should not teach boys. Those who have not joined a unions – almost 17%, of which 210 women and 164 men – indicated different reasons for not being members, the main being a **lack of information** about the existence of a union or about how to register and become a member, or to access the services provided by the union. A woman teacher however stated she would like to join a union as it is her right to do so.

Some respondents, mostly from Herat, stated that **no unions** were specifically addressing the issues affecting teachers/educators, or that most unions have been closed down.

Herat is also the province where most teachers expressed very negative views about unions – *“Unions are nothing but hypocrisy”, “Union is only a slogan”* – and a **lack of trust** in the work of unions and their capacity to be effective and achieve results: *“I rarely saw their [the teachers] rights and problems being addressed.”*

Some respondents who decided not to be union members said they felt that unions did not really represent the interests of the teachers, and that *“the people who are at the top are more interested in their own interests”*. This and the **perception of some form of corruption** were among the reasons for teachers not becoming members of a union. As one teacher said, for example: *“The teachers’ union in our province has not achieved anything for several years and they are always waiting for gifts from the government authorities. They do not listen to the teachers’ demands and do not respond to the teachers’ demands.”*

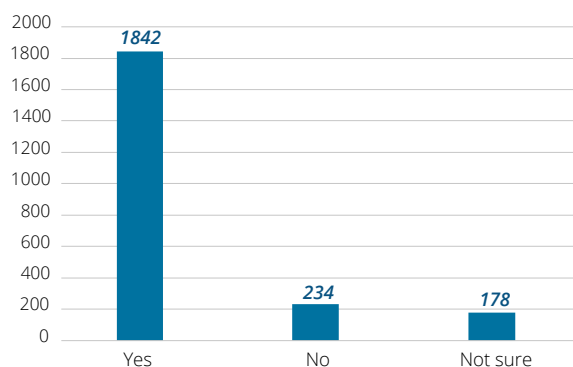
Additionally, some teachers who were not union members said it was not worth joining as *“they [the unions] will not be able to do much in Afghanistan”*. The **political situation** in the country is also therefore a reason for the lack of trust and the feeling of frustration.

The **fees**/costs of membership were also indicated as dissuasive in the decision to join unions, while some teachers said they were simply not interested or that it was not worth being a member of a union as *“it’s just a symbol”*.

When asked whether they were aware of the existence of a teacher union, the

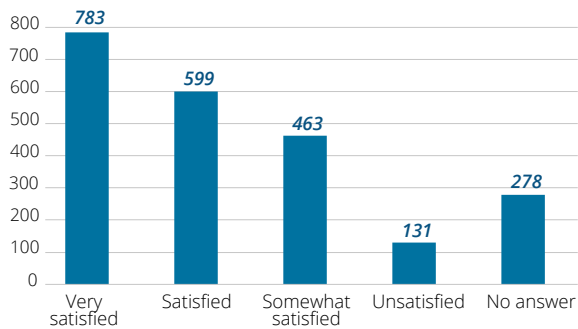
overwhelming majority of respondents, around 80% (almost 50% women), provided a positive response, while only a minority indicated that they did not know or were not sure, confirming the presence of teachers unions in the majority of the provinces. The data collected also reveals that women seem to be more aware of the existence of teachers’ unions.

Table 14: Are you aware of teacher unions?



The research also looked into the level of satisfaction with the service provided by the union among the teachers who are members. Overall, a majority (60%) of teachers expressed satisfaction with their union, responding that they were very satisfied (34%) or satisfied (around 26%), with no particular difference between female and male respondents. Almost 20% of respondents said that they were somewhat satisfied – the majority of whom were women (13%) – and only 131 teachers – around 5%, with no gender divide – stated they were unsatisfied. It is interesting to note that this question registered the highest number of people who preferred not to answer, 278 respondents, equal to over 12% of all union members (7.36% women and 4.88% men).

Table 15: Satisfaction with unions



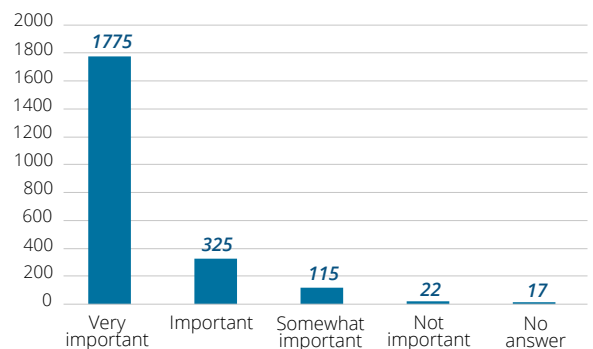
The survey further investigated the kind of **services** that respondents would like the union to provide, and presented them with different options such as workplace representation, tailored training courses, regular newsletters, advice and guidance on professional and other matters, money saving services and benefits, shopping discounts, free insurance protection, opportunities to get involved. Over 13% of teachers indicated that their preferred service would be advice and guidance on professional and other matters and tailored training courses (around 12%). Hence, **capacity building, targeted guidance and professional development emerged as the services in highest demand**, as one fourth of the respondents stressed the increasing need for learning opportunities.

Workplace representation – a union or individual representing them in negotiations on issues such as wages, hours, benefits and working conditions, etc. – was indicated as the second preferred service to be provided by the union (6% of respondents), followed by free insurance protection (4.5%). The remaining options were also all included in the responses, in particular those related to **economic support** such as shopping discounts and money saving

services and benefits, confirming once again the low pay issue and the inability to cover living expenses. **Information sharing** was also indicated by around 3% of the teachers as a service they would like to receive, for example through regular newsletter published and disseminated from their union.

The respondents were also asked if they felt **teacher unions were important** and, as the table below shows, the overwhelming majority, **92%**, provided a positive response: almost 78% (46% women and 32% men) responded ‘very important’ and 14% ‘important’. A small minority, 115 people, representing around 5% of the persons interviewed, felt that having a union addressing the specific issues affecting teachers and educators was ‘somewhat important’ and only 22 respondents felt it was ‘not important’.

Table 16: Importance of teacher unions



Although the respondents were not asked why they felt a union was important, it emerged from the testimonies and answers provided by unionised teachers that, for them, union membership means *“unity and solidarity, and makes our voice stronger”*. Hence, unions are perceived as important, overall, as they are able to represent

workers and negotiate better working conditions on their behalf. A young male teacher in a secondary boys' school in Samangan said, "I am a member of a trade

union and I see what they do to defend teachers like me. It would be nice if unions were really considered and could negotiate better working conditions for all teachers."

3. The current situation in Afghanistan: Challenges and improvements since the time the survey was completed

The past several years have been extremely challenging for the people of Afghanistan. Already suffering from decades of conflict and instability, Afghanistan's human rights, governance, humanitarian and development situations deteriorated sharply after the Taliban takeover in August 2021¹⁰. This transition has not only impacted the political and security situations but also has severe implications for human rights, gender equality and women's rights, as the outcomes of the EI survey revealed in the field of education, impacting the right to learn for girls and women's right to work as teachers.

The EI survey was conducted between March and May 2023. The responses to the survey hence reflect the situation and circumstances under which teachers were living and working and the teachers' unions were operating until that date.

Since that time and the moment when this report was being drafted, in March 2024, EI has been collecting additional information on the overall political situation in Afghanistan and the specific issues affecting the right to education for boys and girls and the right to teach for women and men. This information is also examined in the light of the survey findings, to provide a better

understanding of where challenges remain and where improvements may have been made.

According to the feedback from numerous survey respondents, there is substantial evidence suggesting a general improvement in security conditions in Afghanistan since 2021. Recent updates from EI associated organisations operating in Afghanistan indicate better freedom of movement, particularly for women travelling alone, which has contributed to an increased sense of safety among the population. Women still, however, encounter limitations when it comes to extensive travel, such as between provinces or internationally, unless they are accompanied by a male family member, typically their spouse.

In terms of the **right to education for girls and the restrictions on women in the teaching profession**, EI's sources confirm that in some parts of Afghanistan, especially in the major cities, the situation in March 2024 was that women were able to teach in both girls' and boys' schools until the 6th grade (the final year of primary school, therefore pupils around 11 or 12 years' old). Female teachers who used to teach above the 6th grade now either teach in boys' schools until 6th grade only, and only if there are shortages of male teachers, or stay at home.

¹⁰ United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023-2025, available at the following link: <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/238795-united-nations-strategic-framework-afghanistan>

A noteworthy and encouraging update shared by Education International's focal point in Afghanistan pertains to the payment of wages for female teachers who are currently unable to work, being confined to their homes. This specific situation was not apparent from the responses gathered in the survey but has been provided by EI member organisation NTEC during an online meeting organised early March. EI did not receive any specific details regarding number of female teachers or regions where they are still receiving their wage despite being forced to stay at home. The NTEC's focal point stressed that in certain provinces, particularly in the southeast, there is still cultural resistance towards education and women's rights, resulting in women being confined to their homes as their husbands forbid them from teaching. This circumstance predates the Taliban's takeover in 2021. In many cases, however, female teachers give classes near their place of residence for security reasons, leading to some male teachers being reassigned to schools located far from their homes. Regarding the limitations on male educators teaching girls, it has been reported that male teachers aged over 50 are presently allowed to teach in girls' schools in cases of staff shortages.

In terms of the right to learn for girls, they can currently attend school only until grade 6. They do, however, have access to vocational training settings, often facilitated by NGOs, and girls from more privileged backgrounds can pursue higher or secondary school education in private institutions.

Wages represent a critical issue for the wellbeing of teachers and their families: the overwhelming majority of

respondents repeatedly stressed that pay was not sufficient to cover their basic living expenses, creating drastic situations such as families being forced into debt or being unable to feed their children properly, leading to cases of malnutrition. At the same time, teachers also reported that their salaries, although very low (ranging from AFN 7000 to AFN 15,000), were being paid regularly – a positive change already noted in the 2023 survey that has been confirmed by EI focal points. However, wages continue to be reduced by the Taliban regime, such as the recent cut, from AFN 3000 (around €39) to AFN 2000 (approximately €26), in the allowance for teachers with a master's degree and the AFN 1000 (€13) cut for teachers with a bachelor's degree.

In terms of **freedom of association and the right of unions to operate**, the situation has deteriorated from the time the survey was conducted. At that time, the majority of respondents showed satisfaction with the right to organise and said that their labour rights were respected in their schools, in particular the right to join a professional association or education union. The teachers interviewed also showed a high level of satisfaction with the capacity of their union to negotiate working conditions on their behalf. Since then, however, several unions have been closed down and the right to strike has been suspended. It is also not currently possible to join a union and become a new member, as reported by EI focal partners in Afghanistan.

EI has also recorded the de-legalisation of the NTEC teachers' union. In January 2024, after enduring months of bureaucratic hurdles and frustrating administrative delays, the leadership of the NTEC received news from the

authorities that the organisation would not obtain official registration. The setback was twofold: not only was the NTEC unable to secure recognition as a teacher union, but its attempts to register as a civil society organisation were also obstructed. Moreover, the Council of Ministers decided to strip state employees of their fundamental right to organise. This turn of events dealt a severe blow to the NTEC, leaving it in a legal limbo, deprived of any recognised

status to carry out its activities or effectively engage with its unionised teachers. This move by the Afghan authorities has sweeping repercussions, as it completely cancels freedom of association and the right to organise in the public sector and stresses the need for renewed efforts on the part of global unions to protect and uphold the fundamental rights of workers, particularly those within the crucial field of education.

4. Summary of survey findings

This research conducted by Education International with the precious support of its partner organisation in Afghanistan, the NTEC, gives voice to women and men teachers in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August 2021. In a bid to understand the impacts of the policies introduced by the Taliban regime in the education sector, and on teachers in particular, EI places a significant focus on women's rights and the restrictions on female teachers, such as the barriers to teaching boys. Considering the closure of secondary schools for girls, the study adopts a gender lens in its analysis of the responses provided by female and male teachers, to highlight the unique challenges that female teachers and students reported in terms of the right to work and to learn in Afghanistan.

The research also presents an overview of teachers' living and working conditions in Afghanistan, with a focus on wellbeing, wages and labour rights; it investigates potential changes – positive or negative – resulting from political shifts during the time the survey was conducted, from March to May 2023, and whether these changes have affected male and female teachers' lives and careers differently, and the repercussions on the learning environment for girls and boys.

The survey collected 2517 testimonies from female and male teachers (1318 women and 904 men) in 23 provinces, with 6 provinces constituting 73% of all responses (Herat alone accounted for almost 1000 respondents, followed in decreasing order by Samangan, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kabul

and Badakhshan). In all the provinces, except Nangarhar, female teachers outnumbered males among the respondents. Overall, **almost 60% of the respondents were women**, and of these female teachers over 44% taught in girls' schools, suggesting gender segregation in the teaching profession, with women mostly teaching in girls' schools and men in boys' schools: the male teachers constituted less than 1% of educators in girls' schools while the women teachers represented under 5% of the workforce in boys' schools.

The research also looked at the **years of experience** in the teaching profession and any gender imbalances. It found that more than half of the respondents were teachers with 10 to 20 years of experience, and that women outnumbered men in the category of teachers with 10 to 15 years in the profession, alone constituting around 25% of the total respondents. Very experienced teachers with over 20 years' experience and teachers with less than 5 years' experience constituted approximately the same percentage of respondents, and were almost equally divided between women and men.

One of the most important aspects of the study relates to fundamental rights in the education sector, focussing on the **right to work for women teachers and the right to study and access education for female students**, in view of the restrictions introduced by the Taliban. The teachers were asked to express their views and the overwhelming majority, over 94%, both men and women equally

divided in proportion to the number of respondents, affirmed that girls should have the right to go to school.

It is also interesting to note that among the teachers who said they should not, in particular the women, there was a major inconsistency with the observations they made when asked about their satisfaction with the teaching experience: many were unhappy about the closure of girls' schools and the limitations on women and girls' rights, seeing it as gender discrimination and as detrimental to the country – not allowing half of the population to be educated. As highlighted by the various testimonies collected during the interviews, denying girls' access to secondary education contributes to an overall decline in the education system: neither the female nor male teachers were happy with the closure of high schools, forcing girls from grades seven to twelve to stay at home. These closures have also resulted in the loss of jobs and incomes for women, as indicated by some respondents. However, based on the information collected by our partner, the NTEC, it seems that, in some provinces, women who are not currently able to teach and are forced to stay home are receiving their salary, and some women are able to teach in vocational and private education institutes.

Still, not being able to teach due to the closures of girls' high schools not only caused economic losses for women – and their families – at the time the survey was conducted, but also resulted in frustration and despair as teaching is seen as a 'sacred duty' by many teachers, contributing to the cultural development of society for the benefit of the country. A female teacher, who expressed her wish to remain anonymous, said,

“I remember when I became a teacher, I realised the decency of this job, I realised that my path in this life had been destined since childhood. I realised the love and affection and the passion that flowed from nowhere in my being and unknowingly came to me every day.”

Being deprived of this important work and being forced to stay at home – some female teachers stressed they had been home for 2 years – has a major impact on female teachers' wellbeing, aspirations and professional development, and the impact is not limited to the economic losses alone.

Women teachers are also heavily impacted by the violation of their right to teach boys. The majority of teachers, balanced by gender, believe that women should be able to teach in boys' schools, but here the percentage is lower, as only 53% responded 'always', while around 40% answered 'often' (16%) or 'sometimes' (24%), with women slightly outnumbering men. Female teachers with less than 10 years' experience seem more open to cultural changes as none of them agreed with the barriers to women teaching in boys' schools. As previously indicated regarding the restrictions on the teaching profession, EI's member in Afghanistan indicated that, currently, women are able to teach in both girls' and boys' schools until 6th grade. Female teachers are allowed to teach in boys' schools until 6th grade only and only if there is a shortage of male teachers. In all other cases they are forced to stay at home.

The importance of receiving a decent wage is not only economic – although critical

to the wellbeing of teachers and their families – but also has implications in terms of regard for the profession. Numerous teachers, both women and men, stressed the scant value attributed to their work due to the poor pay. Again, however, we see an inconsistency in the responses of many teachers, as when asked if pay reflects the responsibilities associated with their profession, the majority provided an affirmative response, stating they were satisfied with their salary in relation to the amount of work. At the same time, low pay was indicated as the main reason for unhappiness and emerged as the most crucial issue in terms of decent work for teachers and improving their working conditions (better basic pay was the number one answer provided when asked what would make the job more satisfying).

A positive development is related to payment, as most teachers, 80%, with no gender divide, confirmed their salary had been fully or almost entirely paid in the twelve months prior to the interviews. Additionally, many respondents also indicated that their salary has been paid regularly.

Indeed, receiving a monthly salary was highlighted, particularly by male teachers in boys' schools, as a significant factor contributing to satisfaction with their teaching experience, alongside the enhanced security conditions in the country. Female teachers who expressed satisfaction said they were driven by their dedication to the teaching profession, which they view as a "sacred duty". The research findings show no significant gender divide between male and female teachers expressing satisfaction with their job; many of them, however, expressed unhappiness over the closure of girls' schools despite expressing overall job satisfaction.

The respondents who said they were unhappy with the teaching experience pointed to the low pay and the subsequent inability to meet their basic economic needs as the main reason for dissatisfaction, along with the perception that teachers are not appreciated and valued in Afghan society.

The teachers were very much aware of the violation of women's rights, especially young women teaching in girls' schools, who showed a greater level of awareness about gender equality and discrimination, even describing the Taliban as "*the enemy of the women's class*". The closure of girls' high schools is seen as a denial of girls' right to education, as a step backwards for society, as literacy, science and knowledge are the basis for progress and inclusive development, according to some respondents. The restrictions imposed on women, not allowing them to teach boys, is also a clear violation of women's right to work and an attempt to erase women's participation in the social, economic and political life of Afghan society.

What also emerged from many testimonies was the poor conditions in which schools operate, the lack of electricity and heating facilities, the scarcity of classrooms and seats for students, the lack of drinking water and teaching materials, the poor hygiene and sanitation, and the long distances from people's homes.

The survey also included a question on the curriculum: teachers expressed satisfaction with the curriculum they teach, but in the absence of follow up questions to provide further details and clarify their responses, there are no elements to provide us with an insight into the content of the curricula at the time the survey was conducted and the reasons for satisfaction.

Another notable finding from the survey was the perception that teachers are not widely appreciated and esteemed in Afghan society. While it is true that when this question was posed, half of the teachers of both genders did not give a wholly negative response, saying that Afghan society holds teachers in high esteem, the testimonies collected throughout this report indicate that, for many respondents, the value of the teaching profession is closely tied to fair pay. Hence, low pay is associated with low regard, and with the concept of equal pay for work of equal value in the care sector, of which the education sector is part.

The research also investigated, in addition to potential changes in the working conditions of teachers, **labour rights and particularly rights for teachers as public employees**. The findings of the survey showed that a very high number of teachers (83%) were unionised – particularly women – and satisfied with the services provided by the education unions. As a female teacher in a girls' school in Balkh highlighted,

“Over the last two years, women in our country have encountered unprecedented restrictions, revealing a stark disregard for our humanity. Through our union we call for improved basic pay, professional autonomy and enhanced social security. So far (April 2023), my salary is paid regularly, but the amount is too low.”

Respondents who were not union members indicated a lack of information, a belief that unions are not able to change the situation, are not representative of workers, and perceived corruption as reasons for not joining.

It seems that, at the time the survey was conducted, union rights were provided for teachers working as public employees and that the impact of union lobbying on the teaching profession was quite positive, as many respondents said they were happy with the union's capacity to negotiate rights and working conditions on their behalf, in addition to exercising the right to join a professional association or education union. The union services identified as being in high demand were mainly related to capacity building and professional guidance and development, alongside those providing economic support.

As highlighted in the previous section, however, major restrictions have since been imposed by the Taliban on freedom of association, collective bargaining and the capacity of the unions to operate. It should be noted that, at the time the survey was being conducted, some respondents who were not union members had already indicated that the unions had been closed down in their province.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasise that the right to education encompasses more than just schools opening. Elements such as teachers' pay and working conditions, freedom of association and collective bargaining, access to educational resources, school infrastructure, changes to the curriculum, gender segregation within classrooms and among staff, and the monitoring mechanisms implemented in schools are all vital issues directly influencing the exercise of the right to education.

This study amplifies the voices of both female and male teachers in Afghanistan. By utilising available quantitative data in conjunction with the insights provided by teachers through Education International, significant gaps in our understanding of the state of the education sector and the right to education in Afghanistan can be addressed. This research provides an insight into the living and working conditions of teachers in 2023 and their impacts on students, particularly focusing on the learning obstacles and constraints

faced by girls. It takes an intentional intersectional and gender perspective, recognising the unique challenges encountered by female teachers.

In a context where restrictions have been applied to the right to learn for girls and to work as teachers for women, it is crucial that we promote concerted gender-sensitive efforts in support of inclusive education in Afghanistan. This includes advocating policies and practices that respect equal opportunities for female teachers and ensure that girls have access to quality education. As a female teacher from Balkh province highlighted, *"Beyond the fundamental right to education for all girls, I strongly believe that teachers should have academic freedom. This would not only contribute to a more equitable educational environment but would also empower educators to better fulfil their roles in shaping the future. I hope these issues can be addressed, to create a more just and supportive educational system for students and teachers."*

List of abbreviations

AFN: Afghan Afghanis

ATSA: Afghanistan Teacher Support Association

CCLUA: Central Council of Labour Unions of Afghanistan

EI: Education International

ILO: International Labour Organization

HRW: Human Rights Watch

NTEC: National Teachers Elected Council

NUAWE: National Union of Afghan Workers and Employees



Impact on Afghan Teachers of the Restrictions on the Right to Learn and to Teach

Education FACT SHEET

May 2024

This factsheet shows how the Taliban's grip on Afghanistan has precipitated dire consequences for education, particularly for women and girls. Access to educational opportunities and teaching positions has been severely curtailed. Underfunded education institutions and low salaries for teachers have left many educators struggling to make ends meet, exacerbating the fragility of an already beleaguered education system.

Education International launched the Afghan Teachers' Rights Observatory. This online platform serves as a conduit for Afghan teachers to share their experiences, shedding light on critical issues such as gender inequities, poor status, pay disparities, safety concerns and absence of union rights. This research is informed by over 2000 online interviews and testimonies which document the challenges faced by educators, offering insights to inform policy and advocacy efforts.



National Teacher Elected Council



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