

1.2.6. Impact on the education sector

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A main aim of the Taliban Supreme Leader is reportedly to implement *sharia* in order to ‘purify’ Afghan society.²⁷⁰ The education sector has been impacted by efforts to eradicate some secular subjects,²⁷¹ while religious topics have been expanded²⁷² and promoted.²⁷³ Women and girls have gradually been restricted from accessing education, starting with secondary education in 2022,²⁷⁴ followed by university education later that year,²⁷⁵ and most recently, from attending medical education in December 2024.²⁷⁶ The de facto authorities have been working to revise the school curriculum for private and public schools,²⁷⁷ removing topics deemed ‘against’ Islamic rites and Afghan culture.²⁷⁸ According to Rahimi, the curriculum has not been completely overhauled, but rather, more recent additions have been removed, such as social subject or civic education related to democracy themes.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless, universities have been instructed to stop teaching 18 subjects considered to be in conflict with *sharia*, including topics on gender, women,²⁸⁰ democracy and human rights.²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch reported that the absence of female teachers had led to a reduced range of subjects being taught to boys, and that subjects such as sports, art, civics and culture had been replaced with religious studies.²⁸²

In Afghanistan, *madrassas* are religious institutions that have historically played an important role in educating children.²⁸³ At the time of writing, *madrassas* were the only option for many girls and women to receive education after primary school.²⁸⁴ Madrassas provide religious education, but generally also teach non-religious subjects,²⁸⁵ such as mathematics, science, physics, geography, and languages.²⁸⁶ Before the Taliban takeover, about 5 000 *madrassas* were formally registered with the then government,²⁸⁷ although thousands more operated without registration.²⁸⁸ The de facto authorities have made efforts to regulate the *madrassa* sector,²⁸⁹ including by registering informal *madrassas*.²⁹⁰ These efforts have led up to almost 23 000 *madrassas* being formally registered as of August 2025, according to the de facto authorities.²⁹¹ Only a limited number of these are newly established institutions – about 316 according to the Afghanistan Human Rights Center (AHRC).²⁹² Most *madrassas* continue to be privately run,²⁹³ although a few public so-called *jihadi madrassas* have been established.²⁹⁴

Some commentators worry that *madrassas* may fuel extremism,²⁹⁵ and function as ‘centres for religious indoctrination’.²⁹⁶ The Taliban have been using the education sector to reinforce their ideology within the young generation,²⁹⁷ but Afghanistan experts Haroun Rahimi and Andrew Watkins noted that the name *jihadi madrassa* has caused ‘profound confusion’ as the term is associated with violent religious extremists. Although Rahimi and Watkins could not ‘rule out the extent to which some *jihadi madrassas* may serve as conduits for future employment in the DFA offices, including enlistment in DFA security forces’, they did not find evidence for these *madrassas* engaging in militarised training or education. They also noted that the *jihadi madrassas* apply the same curriculum as other *madrassas*.²⁹⁸ On the contrary, CNN reported that public *madrassas* almost exclusively teach religious subjects.²⁹⁹ AHRC reported that male students of some public *madrassas* had been promised ‘good positions and jobs in government’ upon their graduation.³⁰⁰ According to individuals interviewed by Rahimi and Watkins, people educated in *madrassas* were easy to recruit into the de facto administration, as they often support the Taliban, although governmental service was not mandatory.³⁰¹

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