

## 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.<sup>270</sup> The education sector has been impacted by efforts to eradicate some secular subjects,<sup>271</sup> while religious topics have been expanded<sup>272</sup> and promoted.<sup>273</sup> Women and girls have gradually been restricted from accessing education, starting with secondary education in 2022,<sup>274</sup> followed by university education later that year,<sup>275</sup> and most recently, from attending medical education in December 2024.<sup>276</sup> The de facto authorities have been working to revise the school curriculum for private and public schools,<sup>277</sup> removing topics deemed ‘against’ Islamic rites and Afghan culture.<sup>278</sup> 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.<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, universities have been instructed to stop teaching 18 subjects considered to be in conflict with *sharia*, including topics on gender, women,<sup>280</sup> democracy and human rights.<sup>281</sup> 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.<sup>282</sup>

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

Some commentators worry that *madrassas* may fuel extremism,<sup>295</sup> and function as ‘centres for religious indoctrination’.<sup>296</sup> The Taliban have been using the education sector to reinforce their ideology within the young generation,<sup>297</sup> 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*.<sup>298</sup> On the contrary, CNN reported that public *madrassas* almost exclusively teach religious subjects.<sup>299</sup> AHRC reported that male students of some public *madrassas* had been promised ‘good positions and jobs in government’ upon their graduation.<sup>300</sup> 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.<sup>301</sup>

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