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# **BREAKING POINT:** CHILDREN'S LIVES ONE YEAR UNDER TALIBAN RULE



**Save the Children**

# Acknowledgements

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Sacha Myers/Save the Children

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shows how – in almost every way – children’s lives have changed over the last 12 months. Afghanistan has long been one of the most difficult places in the world for children to grow up, but a year since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, the economic pressure on households is pushing children to breaking point. They’re facing extreme hunger and being forced out of school, into labour and closer to facing serious protection issues including unaccompanied migration and child marriage.

The situation for girls is especially concerning. Girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school, and nearly twice as likely to be going to bed hungry compared to boys.<sup>1</sup> One in every 20 girls has been asked to marry, and one in four girls were reported by their caregivers to show signs of depression on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> Boys and girls both described to Save the Children how changes over the last year have affected girls, leaving many feeling hopeless.<sup>3</sup>

Based on findings from consultations with children, a large assessment of children and their caregivers, and research looking at the status of basic services, Save the Children has found that restrictions – especially those on women and girls, a near total economic collapse, and the policies adopted by the international community are combining to create a child rights disaster for girls and boys in Afghanistan.

## Key findings include:

- Only 3% of households responding to Save the Children’s assessment said they were able to meet their basic needs, and 56% of households described reducing their expenditure on health and education.
- One in four children (25%) reported that they had been asked to help their family through work. Nearly one in ten children were reportedly staying away from the family home, unaccompanied, including for work.
- More than one in twenty girls (5.5%) had been asked to marry.
- More than a quarter (25%) of children reported that they had moved or been displaced in the last year.
- One third (33%) of all children were not attending school. More than double the proportion of girls (46%) reported not going to school compared with boys (20%) at secondary school age.
- 88% of children reported eating less than usual over the last year.
- One in ten children said they frequently go to bed hungry at night, nearly two-thirds of these children are girls (62%).
- More than one in four girls were reported to show daily signs of depressive moods and anxiety (26% and 27% respectively).

To respond to, mitigate, and prevent the issues affecting children, a range of actors will need to change their policies, practices and behaviour. Funding to enable the humanitarian response and support basic services, steps to protect the rights of women and girls, and efforts to bring much-needed liquidity into the economy should all be priorities for governments, donors and the de facto authorities.

### **Save the Children recommends that:**

- Donors must ensure the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan is fully funded – prioritising children’s most acute needs and ensuring funding is flexible and covers operating costs, and that risks are shared with implementing organisations.

- Donors and governments must develop and communicate their strategy for the resumption of long-term and large-scale development assistance to Afghanistan and the transition away from humanitarian-only response.
- The de facto authorities must enable girls, of all ages, to return to school immediately, enable women to access and be a part of the humanitarian response, and refrain from interference in principled humanitarian activities.

*A full set of recommendations can be found on page 27.*



Aashiqullah Mandozai/Save the Children

# METHODOLOGY

This report draws on three separate pieces of research: a survey conducted with children and their caregivers; in-depth consultations with children; and a qualitative and quantitative (mixed-methods) mapping of health, education and protection services for children. In total, Save the Children spoke to 1,690 children from Balkh, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, Kabul, Nangahar and Kandahar across these three projects.

## MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT (MSNA)

This assessment was a follow-up survey with children belonging to households surveyed under Save the Children's last MSNA, which was conducted in November and December 2021.<sup>4</sup> The data was collected from 1,450 children (693 girls and 757 boys) and their caregivers across seven provinces, (Balkh, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, Kabul, Nangarhar and Kandahar). 984 of the children surveyed were aged 11–14, and 466 were aged 15–18.

Due to the movement and migration of families and children, only 60% of the child respondents from the previous MSNA (or 860 children) were able to participate in the follow-up survey. The survey assessment was conducted from 7–23 June 2022 and administered in either Pashto or Dari, through face-to-face interviews. Consent and assent processes with strict ethical considerations were followed. Safeguarding approaches were also employed throughout the study to maintain the safety of all adults and children involved.

## CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN

The children's consultation used a qualitative approach with girls and boys, aged 9 to 17 years old across the same provinces as the MSNA. Multiple participatory data collection tools were identified and subsequently adapted to the target age groups and the context of Afghanistan. A full list of tools can be found in the final report.<sup>5</sup> This included both host and internally displaced communities. Efforts were made to ensure equal numbers of girls and

boys were included in the consultation, and that they were consulted separately to ensure safe, inclusive participation. The consultations were conducted in May and June 2022.

Each focus group discussion consisted of six to ten children to ensure all had a chance to actively participate in the discussion. In total, 240 children took part in the consultation, of which 122 were girls and 118 were boys.

## SERVICE MAPPING

Save the Children commissioned an independent research agency to conduct a critical review and analysis of the availability of, and access to, basic services for children, with a focus on health, education and protection. This review was intended to identify changes to service access and provision between August 2021 and July 2022. This research relied on publicly available resources, including those published by the UN and relevant line ministries, as well as key-informant interviews. In total 15 interviews were conducted with both service providers and technical experts.<sup>6</sup>

# WHAT CHILDREN TELL US

The lives of boys and girls in Afghanistan were turned upside down when the Taliban seized control of the country in August 2021. Following the withdrawal of international forces, the Taliban quickly assumed de facto authority for the first time since 2001.

Almost overnight, gains in children's survival, access to learning, and economic improvement were put on hold, or reversed. Sanctions, capital flight, the withdrawal of development assistance, and the collapse of the banking sector led to an economic crisis which has plunged 97% of households into poverty – with disastrous consequences for children.<sup>7</sup> The stress and strain on communities – in particular children – is only deepened by drought, which has hampered food production and contributed to rising costs.

Importantly, children themselves identify the transition of power and the economy as the main drivers of changes they have experienced in their daily lives over the last 12 months. They are aware of how the political and economic environment has changed, and the effect that has had on them and their families. Boys and girls, to different extents, describe how restrictions imposed on them have had a negative impact, and how the economy has suffered since the Taliban took power.



Sacha Myers/Save the Children



**Parishad's story:**  
***"My brothers wake up at midnight and cry for food"***

Parishad\*, 15, lives in northern Afghanistan. She doesn't go to school because her parents can't afford to feed their children, let alone pay for her books and stationery. Parishad and her family were evicted from their home because they couldn't pay the rent. The landlord offered to buy one of Parishad's siblings, but her parents refused.

*"Some days my father cannot bring food. My brothers wake up at midnight and cry for food. I don't eat, and I save my food for my brothers and sisters. When my brothers and sisters ask for food, I get upset and cry a lot. I go to my neighbour's house and ask for food. Sometimes they'll help and give me food and sometimes they say they don't have anything to give me," Parishad said.*

*"When we left our old house to come to this house, I was deeply upset and I said, 'why are we leaving again, why are we facing these problems again?' I was deeply angry, and it was a very difficult time and I cried.*

*"I would love to go to school. When I see other girls going to school, I wish I could go to school too. Every month we change houses and it's difficult for us to go to school. We also don't have any stationery and we need money to buy books. I can't tolerate it. I can't do anything about it."*

## THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

The transition of power has affected Afghanistan's economy in three main ways.

First, global and national sanctions against the Taliban complicated existing humanitarian response efforts, and required 'carveouts' to ensure humanitarian activities could continue. Some actors, including much of the international banking sector, have discontinued direct financial transfers into Afghanistan. This has hindered the ability to get money into and around the country, put increased strain on the remaining pathways for money transfers, and resulted in increased costs of humanitarian work, particularly related to rising transaction fees associated with the informal transfer mechanism known as hawala.

Second, the freezing of around \$9 billion in Afghan central bank reserves, including \$7 billion in the United States alone, has contributed to a liquidity crisis. Banks have placed limits on the amount of money that can be withdrawn, families have not been able to access cash to pay for crucial goods and services, and businesses and humanitarian organisations – especially local and national ones – are struggling to pay salaries and maintain operations.

Finally, the international community – which once contributed as much as 80% of Afghan government spending – has cut off or slowed development assistance.<sup>8</sup> This is linked to specific legal and policy

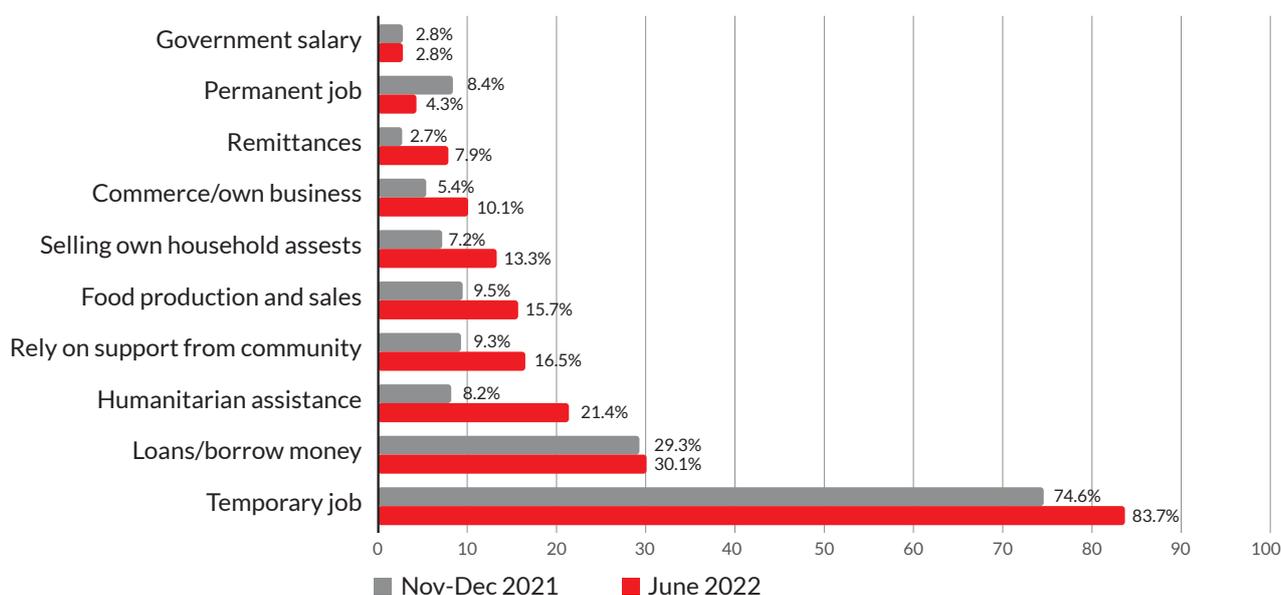
frameworks related to recognition of the de facto authorities, but also the political posture of states. This has affected key sectors of the economy such as health and education, particularly regarding public sector salaries, and has further reduced the amount of money in the Afghan economy.

## HOW THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IS AFFECTING HOUSEHOLDS AND CHILDREN

Save the Children found that 96% of households had lost at least some of their income compared to a year ago with 45% reporting that they had lost most or all (Figure 1). Female-headed households were nearly twice as likely to have lost income, and the number was nearly four times higher where one person in the household has a disability. Sar-e-Pul and Kabul had the highest proportions of households unable to meet all their needs (41% and 17% respectively) and for losing income (43% and 20% respectively).

- Only 3% of households who responded to Save the Children's assessment said they were able to meet their basic needs.
- More than one in ten (13.8%) households are not able to meet any of these needs at all.
- Over half of households (56%) describe reducing their expenditure on health and education.

**Figure 1:** Changes to main sources of household income between November–December 2021 and June 2022



**Figure 2:** Households' ability to meet basic needs



Only 3% of households who responded to Save the Children's assessment said they were able to meet all their basic needs, including medicine and healthcare, education, food, water and shelter (Figure 2). More than one in ten (13.8%) households are not able to meet any of these needs.

The impact on children is profound. The strategies families use to cope include child, early and forced marriage, sending children to work, both locally and abroad, making children do more domestic work, the selling of children or exchanging a child for debt, and providing less food. The impact of these strategies on children are explored in the next section.

Over half of households (56%) describe reducing their expenditure on health and education as a result of poverty. This figure was much higher for households who had lost all their income. Nearly 70% of such households reduced spending on health, and 37% reduced spending on education.

This finding corresponds with the findings of the research commissioned by Save the Children, which found that children's access to healthcare, and to an extent education, is largely affected by affordability, not availability. As families have had to reduce spending on vital services, this has led to poorer physical health, mental health, and hygiene.

### Community breakdown

The economic deterioration is causing heightened tension in communities, and a breakdown within and between groups.

Many children who took part in consultations described how adults are struggling mentally – that they are sad, worried, stressed, angry, hopeless and even desperate.

Some children, especially girls, said there is more conflict and tension in their community now, compared to before. They said that people argue even over small things and are less kind, trusting generous and supportive than before. Some of the comments from boys and girls also suggested that divisions are emerging based on relative poverty and wealth – and strain emerging between those who do, and do not, have continued income.

***“Most of the people lost their kindness. They supported each other in previous years but this year they don't help each other due to poverty and a lack of money and jobs.”*** – Girl aged 15–17, Balkh

# CHILD PROTECTION

- One in four children (25%) reported that they had been asked to work to help their family.
- One in ten reported that children would stay away from home to work – sometimes unaccompanied and some migrating to a different country.
- More than one in twenty girls (5.5%) had been asked to marry.
- More than a quarter (25%) of children reported they had moved or been displaced in the last year.

## Nagina's story: "Before we had a good life"

Nagina\* (13) was enjoying school and had dreams of becoming a doctor before the Taliban took control.

*"Before, we had a good life," Nagina says. "I was going to school, and I was happy. School is a very good thing, and all girls should go to school. But now the situation has become worse. [My uncle] was working and earning money and now he is not here and left us. My older sister is taking care of us."*

Nagina's older sister Yasmin (35) started cleaning people's homes, but with the rising cost of food, she struggled to provide enough for her siblings to eat. She had to choose between buying food or sending Nagina and her brother to school. Yasmin made the very difficult decision to withdraw them both from school. Nagina started cleaning houses with her sister. She is devastated that she can no longer study.

*"There weren't any books, and I couldn't afford to buy notebooks, pens or pencils. I couldn't afford it because I don't have a mother or father. What should I take care of first? Providing their notebooks, pens or food? If I can't provide them with food, then how can I support their other needs?"* explains Yasmin.



Sacha Myers/Save the Children

Many of the rising child protection concerns for boys and girls in Afghanistan are linked to economic pressures on households and the strategies families resort to in response.

In Save the Children's assessment, adults reported paid work (22%), children migrating for work (6%), children leaving the household to stay elsewhere (4%), begging (2.5%) and child, early, and forced marriage (2%) as some of these strategies.

In consultations, children described how – separate to child marriage – some boys and girls were being sold. A few children explicitly mentioned children being sold on the street or at the markets. Once sold, these children are at high risk of forced labour, being forced to engage in illegal activities, and child trafficking. A few girls mentioned they were worried they might also be sold if their family's economic situation worsens.

*“We have seen that people sell their daughters to others because of poverty. They sell their eight-or-nine-year-old daughters in the market since they don't have anything to eat and wear, and if they get sick they don't have money to treat them so they say it's better to sell their children.”*  
– Girl, 15–17, Kabul

## CHILD LABOUR

Boys and girls described how they are being pushed out of education and into various forms of child labour – including dangerous and harmful work – in some cases in another country or away from home.

The numbers of children citing engaging in child labour and leaving home were both higher in the June 2022 assessment compared with the November 2021 assessment, and higher among displaced households, female-headed households, and households with one person who had a disability. The reported rates were significantly higher in households which had lost all their income.

*“Before, we were going to school, but now we are going for wages.”* – Boy 9–14, Kabul

While 22% of adults reported putting their children in paid work, the rate of children reporting that they had been asked to help their family by working was slightly higher – one in four children (25%) responded to this effect. This number was even higher in Sar-e-Pul (37%), Balkh (35%) and Nangahar (28%). Almost double the proportion of boys (32%) compared to girls (16%) responding that they had been asked to

work. Older children were also more likely to be asked to work (34% compared with 20%).<sup>9</sup> While children in households with more income were more likely to be asked to help with domestic work and caregiving, those in poorer households were more likely to be asked to engage in paid labour.

The impact and scale of child labour was highlighted even further in the consultations with children. Girls described how previously they would go to school and spend time with friends – but are now forced to work or do chores. Older girls, who have been prevented from accessing education, are now spending much more time in the home and carrying out unpaid and domestic work. Similarly, only a few of the boys Save the Children spoke to said they were still able to study and/or play with friends – also because of the economic pressure on their household.

Boys and girls also described different types of work – with girls more likely to engage in tailoring, embroidery, carpet knitting or weaving, and other handwork, as well as going with their mother to clean other people's houses. Some girls also mentioned working on their family's farmlands – considered a private space and therefore not subject to the same restrictions on women's and girls' movement. A few girls said they now have to work “a lot”, while some described the work they do as “hard work” and “heavy work”.

*“Last year we used our hands to write, but now we use our hands to weave rugs because we don't have money and we have to work hard.”* – Girl 15–17, Sar-e-Pul

Compared to girls, boys engage in more work outside the home, often alongside male caregivers and family members. Children also said boys are working in mines, brick factories and recycling companies, without any safety measures, which leaves them exposed to chemicals. These are hazardous types of child labour and come with additional protection risks, as boys often have to leave their communities and travel to mines and factories far from home. For example, boys aged 9–14 from Nangarhar province said that many children (sometimes with their families) have left the province to work in the brick factories and a few girls aged 15–17 in Kabul province talked about children leaving their communities to work in places far away in Afghanistan.

## CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE<sup>10</sup>

Children and their families described to Save the Children how – in the context of the ongoing crisis and the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation – increasing numbers of households are resorting to child, early and forced marriage.<sup>11</sup> Although child marriage is an extremely sensitive topic, 3% of all children told Save the Children they had been asked to marry to support their family since the end of 2021. The vast majority were girls – more than one in twenty (5.5%) had been asked to marry – and cases were more common within female-headed households, which we know are experiencing the greatest financial pressures and gaps in meeting basic needs. The most cases reported by children were in Balkh and Sar-e-Pul.

Children themselves described the drivers of the increase in child, early, and forced marriage – telling Save the Children how marriages are happening because families do not have enough money and are poor. Children recognise that this way of coping mainly affects girls, including very young ones. A few girls mentioned that if a girl in the family gets married, there is more money to take care of, and feed, her siblings. In addition, because older girls are no longer allowed to go to school, some parents believe that getting married instead will give them a chance at a better life.

*“I had the desire to get an education, but my parents engaged me.”* – Girl 15-17, Nangarhar

Girls describe how other girls in their community had been forced by their parents to give up school and/or move away to other areas when they married. They are worried and scared that they too will have to get married at a young age and that because of child marriage, they will never be able to go to school again, and that they will not have a future.

A few girls said that having to marry at a young age with an older man makes them feel depressed, or that they had hoped to be able to get married in their own time, when they are ready. Girls feel their parents do not listen to their opinion when it comes to marriage, which leaves them feeling frustrated and powerless. While not discussed in the consultations, the intersection between child, early, and forced marriage and further sexual and gender-based violence risks are also of concern.

*“I feel so bad because all my friends left. I feel like my turn will also come; I will marry an old guy too and my life will be horrible.”* – Girls 15-17, Kabul

## CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Despite the overall security situation improving in Afghanistan, consultations with children showed that high levels of displacement have continued since the Taliban took power in August 2021. More than a quarter (25%) of children reported they had moved or been displaced in the last year – with safety and security (88%), damage to their home (27%) or economic factors (19%) as the main drivers. Some children mentioned that if a family member worked for the previous government, the army or the police, those family members would move abroad.

Girls noted that the absence of male caregivers, including related to the reasons above, was an additional factor in limits on their freedoms. Since August 2021, the ban on women travelling outside the home without a mahram – a male relative – has been expanded and more strictly enforced.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to children moving and leaving their homes, a number of households (8%) reported an adult migrating for work – with children often highlighting this would be their father – and nearly one in ten reported that children would stay away from home – unaccompanied – for work, either in a different part of Afghanistan or migrating out of the country.

*“My brother left school and emigrated to work, to support us.”* – Girl 9-14, Balkh

Both boys and girls described how, mostly, boys under 18 – sometimes as young as 13 – had left the country for employment in Turkey, Iran or Pakistan due to the economic situation. A number of children mentioned how they had lost contact with friends or relatives who had gone abroad, and that children were being forced by their families to seek work outside Afghanistan. This travel incurs huge risks for children. They are likely to become separated from their parents or caregivers, and often undertake dangerous journeys without documentation and through informal routes – including trafficking.



Sachia Myers/Save the Children

**Shekeba's story:**  
**"We can't afford water to drink"**

When she was very young, Shekeba\*, now 15, lived in a village in Jawzjan province. Life was good until her father was killed when a wall collapsed. Her family was then caught up in conflict three years ago. They fled their village.

*"There was a war... a plane bombarded our old house, and it was completely destroyed. Initially, I used to study in a school in Darzab. And then a plane came and destroyed our school," Shekeba explains.*

*"[Because of the war], we came here. Then my mum set up a tent here. But she became afraid to live inside the tent. She couldn't sleep for the whole night, and she moved the tent to another site. We couldn't afford food to eat, tea to drink or clothes to wear.*

*"Then we moved to a house [in the city] and we gave one or two months' rent. But we couldn't pay any more. And now we've moved here. At this house, the landlord said he won't make us pay rent. We can't pay the rent and he doesn't ask for it.*

*"This year, everything has become expensive and we can't afford food to eat. We can't afford water to drink. When we do work for others, they give us bread and we bring it home."*

## Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)

The current economic, humanitarian and child rights crisis does not exist in isolation from decades of conflict in Afghanistan. The vast majority of Afghan children have only ever known conflict – at least 28,000 children were killed or maimed between 2008 and August 2021.<sup>13</sup>

The UN had to pause monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children in Afghanistan due to instability following the change in power in August 2021. However, the high number of recorded grave violations in Afghanistan from January to August alone that year meant the country remained among the worst for grave violations globally. The Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict confirmed that 626 children were killed and 1,700 injured up to August 2021 – the highest global total.<sup>14</sup> The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has since published its figures covering September 2021 to June 2022, which are in addition to the annual Children and Armed Conflict report – recording that in that period, at least a further 441 children were killed or injured.<sup>15</sup>

In consultations with Save the Children, many boys and girls across all age groups spoke about their experience of war. Some described how they were very scared, anxious, and felt unsafe. They described seeing people being injured or killed, gun fights, explosions, people fleeing their communities and fighter jets and helicopters bombing villages.

Some girls and boys described no longer seeing the military and police in their communities, but instead seeing members of the Taliban, who they did not know and who were strangers in the communities. Some girls (aged 15–17) said this was the first time they saw men who are not police carrying weapons. Some children described these changes as scary.

Even though the damage caused by decades of conflict is still visible, most children said that things are more stable now and – aside from ongoing concerns about suicide attacks – security is improved. According to some children, especially boys, people can travel to other provinces again, which they could not do during the conflict.

However, children remain worried about the prospect of war breaking out again in the near future – and further – the risk posed by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (IS-KP), who have claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in 2022. Children mentioned not just that they are worried by these attacks, but also that they could lead to wider conflict.



Sacha Myers/Save the Children

# EDUCATION

- **One third (33%) of all children were not attending school.**
- **More than double the amount of girls (46%) reported not going to school than boys (20%) at secondary school age.**
- **The number of children not attending school due to family responsibilities rose dramatically – up from 18% to 28%.**

Children's access to education has been one of the issues highlighted most by the international community in 2022 – particularly access for girls. Following months of promises that secondary school-aged girls (11–12 years old and above) would be able to return to school in March 2021, a last minute u-turn by the Taliban extended a ban on their attendance (informal arrangements and local leadership have enabled girls' secondary education to continue in some provinces and districts despite the ban).<sup>16</sup>

At the time of writing, girls have been prevented from going to school for more than 300 days – in addition to any gaps they may have already experienced due to COVID-19. One in three secondary school-aged girls reported to Save the Children that they were unable to go to school due to closures specifically for girls. More than half (54%) of the children Save the Children spoke to in June 2022 who were not attending school have been missing out on learning for more than a year.

Although access and quality were major issues related to children's education before August 2021, according to many children Save the Children spoke to across all age groups, in the past schools were open, school materials were available, and both boys and girls were happy they could attend their classes. Some children said that while COVID-19 had prevented them from going to school in the year before, they had kept studying and, in some cases, boys and girls said that at least they could continue to follow classes online.

Children told us this has all changed, particularly due to restrictions on secondary school-aged girls attending classes, and because of the impact of the economic crisis. Many children mentioned that there are fewer students and teachers in schools now compared to before and that girls' schools have remained closed.

Most children said that older girls are affected most by the current situation because they are no longer allowed by the de facto authorities to attend school. In addition to this formal restriction, some girls shared that their parents, brothers and members of the community reinforce restrictions for girls, even younger ones, because of real or perceived risks regarding compliance, or even their own views. A few older girls mentioned that they had tried to talk to their father, mother and brother to convince them to let them return to school where it was available, but these girls still reported no longer being able to go to school.

Further, in consultations, children described how the shortage of female teachers was making it even more difficult to access school, and the requirement to now wear a hijab or burqa – which they cannot afford – further restricted their freedoms.

*“Last year everyone was able to go to school, but this year only children under 6th grade can go to school, which is very disappointing and is a negative change. Some fathers don't let their young daughters to go to school since their teachers are male. If the teachers were female, they may let their daughters go. We want female teachers to teach so everyone will be able to go to school.”*

- Girl 9-14, Kabul

While figures for 2022 are not yet published, according to research commissioned by Save the Children, data for 2021 shows that even if the same number of female teachers were present this year, the number would fall far short of meeting the teacher–student ratio required for segregated learning. For example, in June 2021 there was only one female teacher to every 1,199 female students at intermediate school level (7–11 years old).<sup>17</sup> In

comparison, the male teacher–student ratio in Nangahar for the same age-group was 1:39.<sup>18</sup>

While the ban on older girls’ learning and the shortage of female teachers are major barriers, they are not the only reasons children – both boys and girls – are missing out on education. In total, Save the Children’s assessment found that one-third (33%) of all children were not attending school – regardless of whether they were enrolled or not. This number was especially high in Kandahar, where nearly half (46%) of all children were not attending school.

The numbers of children attending school on a regular basis were higher among younger age groups, and for boys. The number of younger children attending school has actually risen since November 2021 – increasing from 50% to 65%, but the number of older children has fallen from 43% to 39%. While the reasons for this are unclear from the assessment alone, this corresponds with the rise in child labour, displacement, and the reduction in household spending power described above – and also, crucially, with the restrictions on older girls’ access to education.

The slight overall increase in school attendance compared to November 2021 has been driven by the resumption of education services for younger age groups – including girls at the primary level – and the return to school of boys. However, older girls have been significantly negatively affected in 2022. More than double the proportion of girls (46%) reported not going to school compared to boys (20%) at secondary school age. It is important to note however, that in some provinces and districts, informal arrangements and local leadership have enabled secondary school education to continue for girls. While this applies to

a small number of girls, their access – as well as that of younger girls and boys – should be protected and expanded.

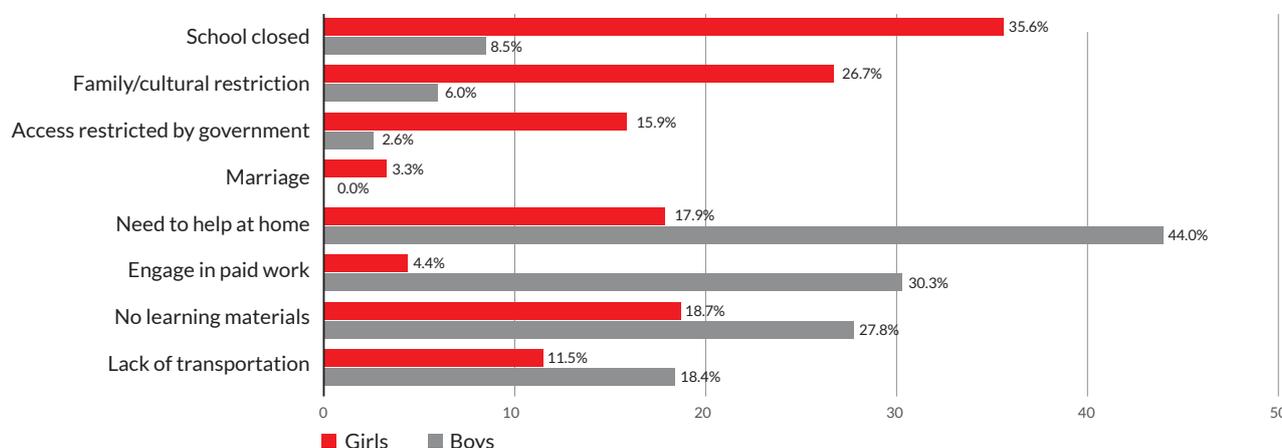
While further work needs to be conducted to fully understand the relationship, there seemed to be a connection between poor school attendance and feelings of depression, sadness and anxiety.

Approximately one in seven of all children reported not attending school due to a disability – but of these, more than half cited depression, anxiety and sadness as the reason. Cognitive difficulties, for instance memory and focus, were also cited as reasons for not attending. While discussed separately from this assessment, in consultations, children also described the impact of hunger and malnutrition on their ability to study. Further still, some children also mentioned that they find it more difficult to focus on their studies and remember things, because they worry about the challenges in their lives.

Beyond disability, the most common barriers identified by children were a lack of learning materials and uniform (30%), increased family responsibilities (28%), schools remaining closed (25%), unaffordability of school costs (20%), unavailability of learning spaces nearby (18%) and transport costs (14%). Most of these remain similar to responses in November 2021, however, the number of children not attending school due to family responsibilities rose dramatically – up from 18% to 28%. Boys were more likely than girls to be affected, with almost half of boys who were not attending school reporting this as a key barrier compared to 18% of girls.

*“I was asked by my parents not to go to school because they cannot afford my educational material expenses.”*  
– Girl, 9–14, Jawzjan

**Figure 3:** Reason for not attending school, by gender



While overall, security decreased as a concern for children accessing schools, restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities rose significantly as an issue cited by children – tripling as a concern between November 2021 and June 2022 (3%–11%). In total, 20% of children who didn't feel safe at school cited such restrictions as their reason. In consultations, some children mentioned the fear of suicide attacks as a factor, though predominantly children focused on other issues – particularly related to the lack of materials and teachers at schools, as well as the issues of affordability and restrictions already discussed.

In the consultations, children expanded on the role of teachers as a factor in whether they attended school. Children described big changes in relation to their teachers, with boys aged 9–14 and 15–17, as well as girls 9–14, saying that there are fewer teachers in schools. Children raised the late or non-payment of salaries, as well as the fact their teachers may have left Afghanistan, as drivers.

Children also reflected on the declining quality of teaching – citing a lack of motivation from teachers, a lack of qualifications for certain subjects, and the fact that to fill gaps, older students are teaching younger children. A few girls and boys (in four provinces) shared that teachers treat them badly and hit them.

The impact of these barriers to education are clear. Children said that they liked going to school, because they can learn new things and meet their friends. They also enjoyed playing at school, doing sports and school competitions. Not being able to go to school makes children – in particular girls – upset, disappointed and even depressed. Girls mentioned that they feel sad when they see other children going to school, and some feel sad and even ashamed that they are unable to read and write.

The restrictions placed on girls' opportunities to study have left girls feeling demotivated and hopeless across all age groups, which is sometimes further reinforced by the comments of those around them. A few girls mentioned that people in the community, or even their family members, ask them why they are still going to school, when there is no point and that they should leave school and find work instead. The girls and boys who still study said they find it more difficult to stay motivated, because they feel the future looks bleak and it is unclear how studying will benefit them.

*“In the past we always thought about studying hard and we studied hard too, but now our families are saying that you are not going to reach your goals.”*

– Girl 15-17, Balkh



# CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

- 88% of children reported a reduction in food intake over the last year
- One in ten children frequently go to bed hungry at night; nearly two-thirds of these children are girls (62%)
- More than one in four girls shows signs of depression and anxiety on a daily basis, according to caregivers (26% and 27% respectively)

As with many areas of children's lives, drought, economic collapse, and households' negative coping strategies are harming children's health, nutrition and overall well-being.

## NUTRITION

More than 9 million children were estimated to be facing high acute food insecurity (Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) phase three or above) in Spring 2022.<sup>19</sup> In Save the Children's June 2022 assessment 88% of children reported a reduction in food intake on over the last year. In Nangahar, 99.5% of children reported a decrease in food intake, with 97% of children reporting the same in Sar-e-Pul.

*"This year, our parents tell us to eat less and once a day."*  
– Girl, 15–17, Sar-e-Pul

Of the one in ten children often going to bed hungry at night in the 30 days prior to Save the Children's assessment, nearly two-thirds were girls (62%), indicating that girls were likely to be missing out to benefit their male siblings and peers. Older children were also more likely to miss meals than their younger siblings. In consultations, children described how not only were they eating fewer meals, but these were smaller and – as discussed further below – very different from the types of meals they used to eat. In a number of cases, children described only eating one meal a day, sometimes consisting of bread and tea only, or only one full meal a week – in some cases only once a month.

Most children explained that they used to be able to eat a sufficient quantity and quality of food, including healthy items such as meat, fish, eggs, vegetables and fruit on regular basis. Boys and girls also described having choice – being able to eat their favourite food, as well as treats. However, as of June 2021, most children indicated they do not have meat, vegetables or fruit with their meals, and only a small number of boys reported regularly eating vegetables. Instead, boys and girls are mostly eating dry bread or yoghurt, with some girls saying even bread is hard to come by due to the increasing cost of flour. Some boys described only eating potatoes or rice – and children cited the price of cooking oil preventing meal preparation.

*"Our economic situation was better last year and we used to have better food than what we are having now. We have not had meat in our diet for weeks now. The price of flour has doubled over the past year. No one has ever experienced this sort of economic hardship in the past."*

*"Our family are just trying to survive."*  
– Girl, 9–14, Faryab

Overall, children identified the cost of food and cooking supplies – not the availability – as the main driver of these changes. Shortages within households are occurring because families cannot afford to purchase these items either because of a lack of income or rising prices. In Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan, older boys also mentioned the drought as a factor in their reduced food intake.

Beyond the emotional toll of these changes, children also identified the physical effects of malnutrition. Boys and girls of all ages highlighted the negative effects of not eating enough healthy food on their bodies and minds. Children described how those not eating enough healthy food would fall sick, lose weight, not grow and may experience malnutrition – especially very young children. Children highlighted that this can lead to loss of life, and also mentioned other effects, including the development of stomach problems and skin diseases.

*"We get thinner every day."* – Boy, 15–17, Sar-e-Pul

Many boys and girls described feeling weak, with some mentioning that as a result they cannot do their work and chores properly. And many children mentioned that they are unable focus on studying and learning due to hunger and poor nutrition.

## HEALTH SERVICE AVAILABILITY

Contrary to some assumptions and the narrative emerging internationally, research commissioned by Save the Children found that the availability of healthcare has not changed dramatically – particularly when focusing on the physical presence

of health facilities. Instead, increasingly children are unable to access or afford the healthcare which is available.

For instance, as shown in Table 1, while there was a noticeable drop in the availability of some health services in Afghanistan in November 2021, the overall number of health facilities remained relatively stable between March 2021 and March 2022. The total number of facilities reported by the Ministry of Public Health to UNICEF dropped from 3,008 in March 2021 to 2,926 in March 2022.

Health Facility Type	Basic Health Centre (BHC)	Comprehensive Health Centre (CHC)	Drop In Centre Prison	District Hospital (H3)	Family Health House (FHH)	Mobile Health Team (MHT)	Other facility	Provincial Hospital (H2)	Regional / National Hospital (H1)	School Hygiene Club	Special Hospital (SH)
Active number in March 2022	823	422	5	82	205	245	54	23	5	1056	6
EPI/Polio Servicers	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	DK	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA
Psychosocial care	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	DK	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Nutrition Support	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	DK	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA
Iron supplement	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	DK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Availability of midwife	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	DK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Active number in March 2021	846	401	5	87	243	208	96	25	8	1071	22
Active number in November 2021	772	379	4	77	221	202	70	24	6	988	18
Difference from March 2021 to November 2021	-74	-22	-1	-10	-22	-6	-26	-1	-2	-83	-4
Difference from March 2021 to March 2022	23	-21	0	5	38	-37	42	2	3	15	16

**Table 1:** Health facilities in Afghanistan, March 2021 to March 2022 Source: Ministry of Public Health Reporting to UNICEF

This relative stability in overall availability does not however correspond with children’s access to health services. In fact, as discussed in more detail below, both boys and girls described that they faced challenges accessing healthcare other than the availability of facilities. For instance, some families could not afford transport and medication, even though a nearby clinic remained open.

This was partially confirmed by engagement with healthcare providers, who reported that the biggest challenges were linked to increasing demand, the

cost of transport, and the availability of quality medication and resources within facilities. Research commissioned by Save the Children found that due to sanctions and the broader economic environment, health facilities are facing procurement challenges and becoming reliant on expired and poor-quality medication. Healthcare professionals described how this medicine is not having a medicinal effect on patients.

*“[We do not] have enough medicine in our clinics.”*  
– Boy, 9–14, Nangarhar

The reduction in household income and subsequent reduction in expenditure on health, raised in children's consultations and Save the Children's assessment, was also highlighted by healthcare providers as a factor affecting families' ability to pay for transport, but also a shift in the wider healthcare market. Prior to August 2021, a number of households would access private healthcare, however greater numbers of people are now relying on public services, creating a surge in demand and stretching resources.

One paediatric specialist from Kandahar described how the number of children they are treating in their unit has risen from around 100 a day to 250–300 children a day. Similarly, a paediatrician in Balkh raised the challenge of treating three to four times the number of children presenting with malnutrition with insufficient medication and staff.

## CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

While some children indicated that there is no clinic or hospital close enough to visit, most boys and girls said they could not get medical help for financial reasons, even if a clinic was nearby. Children said that before, their parents could afford treatment, but now they cannot because of the difficult economic situation.

Some noted that even if they could go to a clinic to get help, there would not be enough doctors, facilities or medication – with some children mentioning that doctors have left their jobs (or Afghanistan) and there is a shortage of female doctors. This specifically poses a barrier to girls and women, especially to sexual and reproductive health services.

According to a number of the children we consulted, clinics do not have enough medicines or they have none at all – in contrast to last year. In addition, a few children mentioned that medication used to be free, but now they are referred to stores to buy it, posing yet another barrier. Finally, a few children also said there are problems with the quality of the medicines that are available – highlighting the same issue raised by healthcare professionals.

Children described various ways in which they cope with these challenges. Most children indicated that if they need help when they are sick, they ask their parents, other relatives or members in the community for help. A few children mentioned that their family will borrow money from others such as relatives or neighbours) to cover the costs involved in seeking treatment. However, a few children also shared that because everyone is struggling financially, people are less able to help each other. In one group, girls even explained they hide the fact that they are sick from their parents, because they know their parents cannot pay for treatment. A few children mentioned they will rely on traditional medicine, or their parents will keep them at home to take care of them until they get better (unless it is very serious) and may give them some paracetamol.

Building on the reports from healthcare providers that they are seeing a rise in demand, children themselves have described a deterioration in their health. Almost all the children we spoke to, irrespective of age, described physical and/or mental health issues, and some also raised water shortages linked to drought as a potential risk factor.

*"We get sick more than last year."* – Boy, 9–14, Balkh

Children described feeling weak, lacking energy, suffering from fevers, coughs and stomach aches. Boys and girls believe their health has been affected by their diet and food intake over the last year, and indicated that they are experiencing physical pain and injuries – possibly also linked to rising instances of child labour. Children described not growing and losing weight.

*"We don't have food and it affects our health. We cannot study well; our bodies grow slow and feel weak. We are not as active as we were."* – Girl, 9–14, Kabul

The intersection between physical and mental health was also apparent in consultations with children. A number of the physical issues children described – such as headaches, pains and lack of energy – can also be psychosomatic, caused by stress and other negative emotions children experience on a day-to-day basis.

## Menstrual hygiene

Some girls felt comfortable enough to talk to Save the Children about menstrual hygiene, which is a sensitive topic in Afghanistan. The girls shared that they do not have any pads that they can use when they have their period. Instead, they currently use old cloths, which they consider uncomfortable (because they irritate their skin) and unhygienic. They worry about getting ill or having an infection. Some girls mentioned that they have bad cramps with their period, but do not have any painkillers, and that they worry about anaemia, because they do not eat enough.

Girls mentioned they feel shy talking about this topic, even with their own mothers. They feel uncomfortable asking their mothers to buy pads or underwear for them, or asking for medication to ease the pain of the cramps. Families are also unlikely to be able to afford these items.

Without the right items to manage their menstrual hygiene, girls face significant health risks. This is especially worrisome given the barriers children face to accessing healthcare. The lack of menstrual hygiene items may also further affect girls' ability to leave the house and go to school.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of the events of August 2021 and the subsequent changes to children's lives came out strongly in consultations, and in Save the Children's assessment. According to adult respondents in the assessment, more than one in four girls have shown signs of depressive moods and anxiety on a daily basis (26% and 27% respectively) – much higher than the corresponding results for boys (16% and 18% respectively) – with caregivers reporting an average of 20% of children showing a sign of either depression or anxiety.

Children with any disability were nearly three times more likely than those without disabilities to have reported showing a daily sign of anxiety (42.5% compared with 15.6%). A higher proportion of children from poorer households (40.6% compared to 14.5% in relatively better-off households) and children in female-headed households (36.2% compared to 17.5% in male-headed households) reported experiences of depression.

*“With all of these troubles, staying positive seems to be impossible.”* – Girl 9-14, Faryab

Most girls said they now feel worried, stressed, anxious or depressed. Some children, mostly girls, also mentioned trouble sleeping at night because they worry about their problems and have bad dreams.

Some boys described similar issues, describing feeling hopeless, worried and sad – for some because they

now have to work – but they were more likely to speak about being sick in general terms, including being physically sick. Boys were less likely to describe how the situation has affected their mental well-being than girls, possibly linked to greater continuity in their ability to socialise and engage in activities outside the home. However, significant concerns such as addiction and suicide were mentioned in the context of boys more than girls.

*“We are disappointed and always ask ourselves whether Afghanistan will prosper and develop or not.”*  
– Girl 9-14, Balkh

Overall, scores were much more positive for boys in the assessment conducted by Save the Children. Half of all boys expressed a positive feeling – they felt happier, more hopeful or safer than before August 2021, nearly double the number of girls reporting similar feelings. In total, two-thirds of children expressed negative feelings – including feeling more worried, more sad, more angry, or more bored. This number was slightly higher for older children (71% compared to 65%) and also for girls (75% compared to 59%).

*“I became upset and hopeless”* – Girl 9-14, Jawzjan

Consultations with children confirmed many of the findings from Save the Children's assessment. Boys and girls shared that before, they lived a relatively good life and could do the normal things that children do, and had hopes and dreams for their futures. Children explained they used to be happy, had fewer

worries and were optimistic about their lives. This has all changed now, but many children – most girls and a few boys – mentioned that they do not have much choice but to adapt and get used to the new situation.

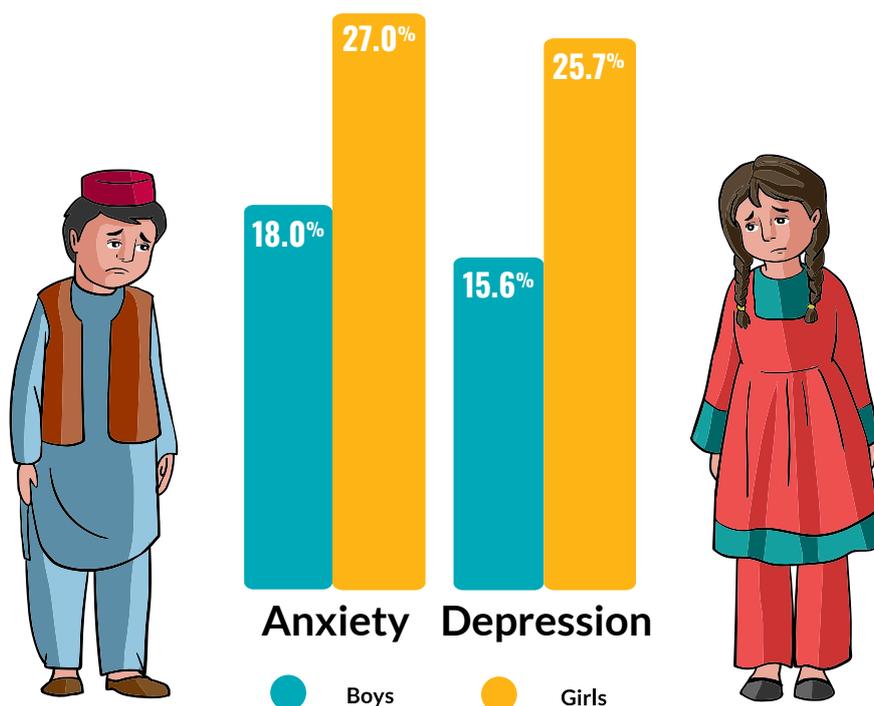
However, it's clear these changes are taking a significant toll on children's well-being and have heavily affected how children feel, both on a daily basis and about their future. Boys and girls predominately associated negative feelings with all the changes and the uncertainty in their lives, mentioning feeling sad, upset, stressed, angry, disappointed, demotivated, scared, worried, and depressed.

Most boys and girls, throughout the discussions, said they are sad and worried about the economic situation in Afghanistan. They worry and feel stressed continuously, about family members who have lost their jobs, finding work themselves, having enough food to eat, and being able to afford other important things, such as doctors' fees and school materials.

They are upset they have to work, because they want to study or play with friends instead. Changes in their supportive environment, not being able to see friends (or seeing them less), and restrictions on playing not only make children unhappy and frustrated, but also affect their resilience to deal with the stress they experience. Some girls specifically described feeling isolated, now that they are restricted in leaving the house and cannot see relatives and friends.

Girls in particular, across all age groups, expressed disappointment and anger over the fact they can no longer go to school or go where they want to go. They worry they may never go back to school or get a job, some saying they cannot be independent when they grow up. Some girls said they feel hopeless about their future because they no longer have the rights and freedoms they used to.

*“My view is that we have no right to freedom because of these changes.” – Girl 15-17, Balkh*



According to interviews with their caregivers, 26% of girls are showing signs of depression compared with 16% of boys, and 27% of girls are showing signs of anxiety compared with 18% of boys.

# A CHALLENGING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Sanctions, the withdrawal of development assistance, lack of liquidity and the essential need to manage risks to principled humanitarian action are compounding the day-to-day situation for children and complicating the response to the crisis.

Sanctions are affecting the provision of basic services in Afghanistan in a very direct way, including for instance the ability of healthcare providers to procure safe and quality medication. While the UN Security Council sanctions regime (UNSC resolution 2615) provides important exceptions, which are designed to enable humanitarian activity, the uncertainty, chilling effect, and disincentivising impact they have on important elements of the private sector, as well as on broader development activities, is further undermining the ability of households to meet their basic needs. The time-bound nature of UN Security Council sanctions creates uncertainty and affects commercial investment. While sanctions are crucial to preventing aid diversion and to achieving states' counter-terror objectives, extending the renewal dates of sanctions regimes and further steps to clarify exemptions related to support for basic needs, would have a positive effect.

Humanitarian organisations are still experiencing significant limitations on their ability to move crucial funds into, and around, Afghanistan. Due to a lack of liquidity within the major banks, there are tight restrictions on cash withdrawals (often a maximum of 5% of account value), and humanitarian agencies – especially national and local organisations – face enormous obstacles paying staff, delivering activities, and sustaining operations.

While the UN has been able to bring US dollars into Afghanistan, the majority of organisations operating in Afghanistan still rely heavily on the traditional hawala money transfer system. This is not only costly, with the rates charged by hawaladars increasing dramatically in the last 12 months, but also adds risk and uncertainty.

The centralisation of humanitarian funding within pooled funds – a measure taken by donors to manage perceived risks, means that the high operating costs

are often passed onto smaller organisations. This is not only impractical, but is hampering the quality and localisation of the response. This is particularly crucial for rural and hard-to-reach communities, many of whom had not been accessible at all until this year due to conflict and insecurity.

Efforts to create a Humanitarian Exchange Facility (HEF) – a system whereby private companies and humanitarian agencies can trade dollars and afghanis within a managed, secure, closed-loop facility are crucial, but stalled.

While there has been some engagement with Afghanistan's largest bank, Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), and improvement in the functionality of other banks, for instance Azizi, some European and American commercial banks are still showing reluctance to transact with humanitarian organisations working in Afghanistan. This is despite efforts from governments to clarify, and emphasise, humanitarian exceptions – for example General Licenses issued by the US Treasury Department.<sup>20</sup>

More can be done to improve the posture of private sector actors internationally. More can also be done, perhaps via the UN in-country but with the support of International Financial Institutions, to restore and in places enhance the technical capacity of central banking institutions, and integrate them into the response.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the international community in the long term is the challenge posed by the question of recognition of the de facto authorities. As a neutral and impartial humanitarian actor, Save the Children does not proscribe any political views. However, children have told us of their growing long-term needs in terms of healthcare, education and infrastructure, as documented in this report. It is not sustainable to continue with humanitarian-only approaches in Afghanistan. In 2022 Afghanistan was already the largest humanitarian response globally, with a funding target of \$4.4 billion; without a resumption of long-term development assistance this will only rise further.

The tentative budget proposed by the de facto authorities has huge gaps, with technical posts as well as large projects which were previously funded by overseas development assistance now managed by line ministries. The hollowing out of central capacity and resources has not been replaced, and this poses risks to children now that will only increase over the long term. While the resumption of some activities through the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund is positive, donors need to be clear about how and when they will resume large scale, long-term development assistance. Delays in taking action not only undermine lives and livelihoods now, but also mean that crucial sectors remain at risk of further deterioration that will be harder and more costly to repair later.

In addition to the challenges posed by the positions and policies of the international community, NGOs also face challenges nationally and locally from the de facto authorities. For example, the mahram policy restricts the ability of women to work – including participation in the humanitarian response, and also drastically increases the cost of operations.

The need for approvals from multiple line ministries and provincial authorities is often time-consuming and can involve multiple delays. In some cases, Save the Children partners are facing delays of multiple weeks for projects which only last one or two months. Further, while humanitarian actors have successfully negotiated improvements related to principled humanitarian action, this continues to require sustained and coordinated engagement by humanitarian leadership within Afghanistan.



Sacha Myers/Save the Children

## Temor's story:

*"I would like bread and milk to feed my little sister"*

Temor\* (12) lives with his mother, Sonia\* (36), two brothers, and sister, Samera\* (7 months) in a single-room home in Faryab, northern Afghanistan. Their community is very remote, and they don't have access to clean water, a permanent health clinic or a school. Like most of the children in his community, Temor has never been to school.

The ongoing drought and the severe economic downturn in Afghanistan have greatly affected employment opportunities in the community. Sonia's husband has travelled to Iran.

Sonia and Temor's situation is becoming increasingly desperate. Food prices have skyrocketed and with no income, Sonia cannot afford to buy food for her children. Samera is suffering from severe acute malnutrition, one of the biggest killers of children under five around the world. Samera weighs just 3.6kg.

*"Everything is worse now. My mother and father are unemployed," Temor says. "My father is in Iran, and he doesn't send any money and my sister needs milk. We have nothing to drink and nothing to eat."*

*"We eat three times a day but only pieces of bread. Before, we were eating some good things. Now, sometimes we can find bread and sometimes we can't."*

*"I wish I was older so I could work and make money. I wish I could go to the mosque and to school. If possible, I would like bread and milk to feed my little sister."*

*"We want notebooks, pens, rice and oil. We want our situation to improve. We want to have water here. We don't want war in Afghanistan."*



Sacha Myers/Save the Children

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has shown how in almost every way, children's lives have been severely affected by the transition of power in Afghanistan in August 2021. New restrictions, economic collapse and drought have pushed households towards negative coping strategies and heightened the risk of violations of children's rights. Girls have been especially affected. They are more likely to be out of school, at risk of child marriage, and going to bed hungry than their male peers.

The crisis in Afghanistan is complex, and requires political, humanitarian, economic and development focused action by the international community. Further, it requires a major shift from the de facto authorities themselves. Specifically, Save the Children recommends the following

## **DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:**

- Ensure the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan is fully funded, that it prioritises children's most acute needs, ensures funding is flexible and covers operating costs, and that risk is shared.
- Ensure humanitarian exceptions to UN Security Council sanctions are protected and expanded to provide greater space for the provision of support related to basic needs in areas such as health and education.
- Harness the power of frozen assets, including foreign currency reserves and private assets, to provide much needed liquidity within Afghanistan's financial sector and ease the pressure on households. This should be targeted and strategic – both injecting cash into banks and building technical capacity within the financial sector overall.
- Donors to multilateral institutions and funds, including the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), should replenish the funds which have been repurposed for humanitarian response to ensure there are resources to support Afghanistan's recovery in the long term.
- Develop and communicate their strategy for the resumption of long-term and large-scale development assistance to Afghanistan and the transition away from humanitarian-only response.
- Avoid blanket conditionalities, including on sectors such as education, to ensure that efforts to uphold the rights of children – especially girls – do not have negative, unintended consequences for the most marginalised and excluded children.
- Work with UN and humanitarian partners to learn lessons from other contexts – for instance Yemen – on possible modalities for funding public sector salaries.
- Ensure that the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework (AESTF) is fully funded – prioritising efforts to resource multi-year Education in Emergencies (EiE) work.

## **UN AGENCIES AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD:**

- Work with member states to ensure the recommendations of the High Commissioner on Human Rights' report on the situation in Afghanistan are implemented, in full.
- With the support of donors and the DAB, finalise the development of a Humanitarian Exchange Facility, ensuring other mechanisms for getting cash into Afghanistan continue until the Facility is fully operational.
- Introduce more flexibility in reporting requirements and improve access to pooled funds, with a particular focus on localisation and cost-sharing.
- Expand partnerships to include NGOs where this currently isn't the case. For example, future releases of ARTF funds should look to include direct partnerships with NGOs, either bilaterally or as part of consortiums.
- Ensure they are prioritising – and resourcing – children's rights within broader approaches to monitoring and human rights in Afghanistan. In particular, UNAMA should ensure child protection and child rights are allocated sufficient resources within their mandate.
- Through the Humanitarian Country Team, effectively coordinate and lead common approaches to principled humanitarian action – including joint positions on female aid workers, access, and engagement with the de facto authorities.

## **THE DE FACTO AUTHORITIES SHOULD:**

- Enable girls, of all ages, to return to school immediately – ensuring they are free from intimidation and harassment, and that schools provide equitable catch-up classes and ongoing learning for boys and girls.
- Ensure women can access, and be a part of, the humanitarian response and provision of basic services.
- Clarify the status of key child rights instruments, and the budget and strategy of relevant line ministries related to children's rights.
- Refrain from relocating households involuntarily, including those who had previously left conflict-affected areas.
- Refrain from interference in humanitarian activities and coordinate with NGOs on steps to improve bureaucratic challenges, particularly related to Memoranda of Understanding and approvals.
- Engage with the UN and child protection agencies to address continued grave violations of children's rights.

## Endnotes

- 1 S Arlini, Save the Children Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), June 2022. Available at Save the Children's Resource Centre, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net>.
- 2 See endnote 1.
- 3 E Severijnen, My Future Looks Bleak: Children's Lives One Year Since the Taliban Takeover, 2022. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net>
- 4 S Arlini and M Burgess, (2022). Afghanistan Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, November-December 2021. Available at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/afghanistan-multi-sectoral-needs-assessment/>.
- 5 See endnote 3.
- 6 The final report from this research is for Save the Children's internal use only at this stage, and so far unpublished.
- 7 See endnote 1.
- 8 P Loft and C Mills, Afghanistan: Development, UK Aid, and the Future, 2021. House of Commons Library, no. 9276. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9276/CBP-9276.pdf>
- 9 Older children are 15–18, younger children 11–14.
- 10 Child or early marriage is a formal or informal union where at least one of the parties is under the age of 18. Forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both parties have not given their full and free consent to the union. Child marriage is a child rights violation, and disproportionately affects girls – particularly during crises. Further information can be found at <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-marriage-a-violation-of-child-rights>.
- 11 Overall rate increased from 1.9% to 3%, with children explicitly mentioning it is increasing.
- 12 For further information on the mahram policy and broader situation of women in Afghanistan, see the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security's Gender Analysis of the Situation in Afghanistan: June 2022. Available at: <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/gender-analysis-situation-afghanistan-june-2022/#:~:text=Freedom%20of%20movement%3A%20On%202027,and%20only%20in%20cases%20of>
- 13 UNAMA, Human Rights in Afghanistan Report, 2022. Available at: [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_human\\_rights\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_report\\_-\\_june\\_2022\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_human_rights_in_afghanistan_report_-_june_2022_english.pdf)
- 14 United Nations, General Assembly, Annual Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, 2022. S/2022/493, available at: [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2022\\_493.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_493.pdf)
- 15 See endnote 13
- 16 C Greenfield, 'Taliban orders girls' high schools to remain closed, leaving students in tears', Reuters, 24 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-orders-girl-high-schools-remain-closed-leaving-students-tears-2022-03-23/>
- 17 Analysis of Education Monitoring Information Service (EMIS) data reported to the Ministry of Education/ UNICEF, research carried out by Lee Rasheed for Save the Children, July 2022.
- 18 See endnote 17.
- 19 The Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) is an internationally recognised famine early-warning system, based on a scale from one (minimal food stress) to five (catastrophe/famine). In phase three, people are facing crisis levels of food insecurity and phase four is emergency levels.
- 20 US Treasury, 'US Treasury Issues General License to Facilitate Economic Activity in Afghanistan', 25 February 2022. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0609>.

\*Names changed to protect identities



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