

# COVID ONE YEAR ON: WHY CHILDREN ARE STILL OUT OF SCHOOL



Save the Children

## Why children in Afghanistan are still out of school- and at risk of dropping out for good

### Results of our snapshot survey in Afghanistan

**A snapshot survey carried out by Save the Children suggests that more than one year after the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close, significant numbers of Afghanistan's most vulnerable children are still out of school<sup>1</sup> as a result of child labour, child marriage, relocation and other consequences of the pandemic and ongoing conflict – and girls are particularly at risk. 3 in 5 children at schools we surveyed<sup>2</sup> have not returned to school and are at risk of dropping out for good – with potentially devastating consequences for their and their country's future.**

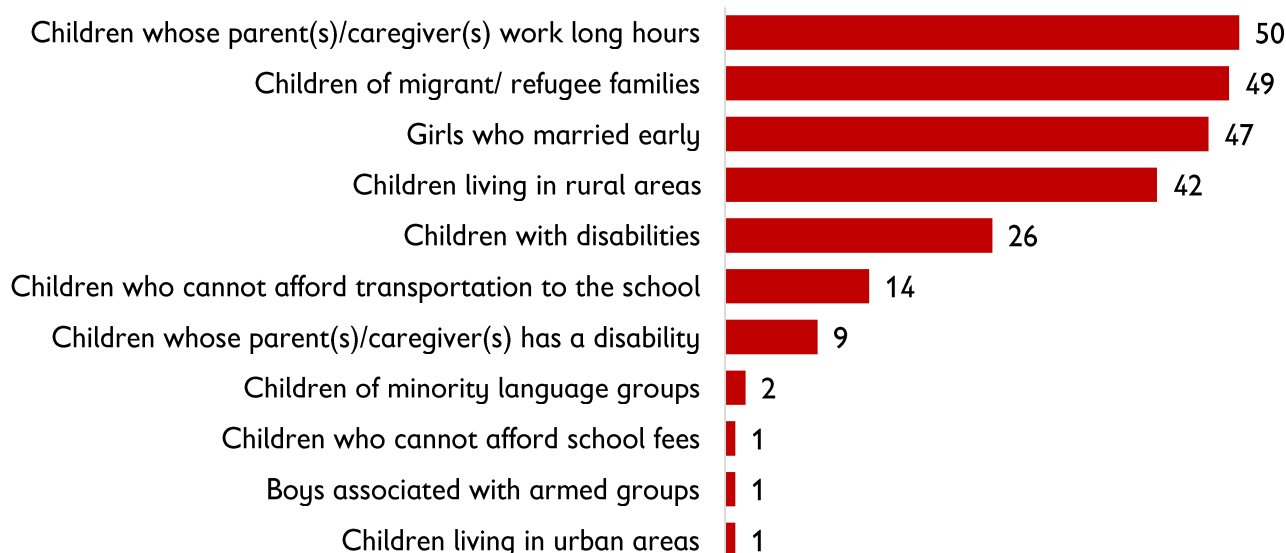
In spring 2020, during the first wave of the global pandemic, schools around the world suddenly shut their doors to 1.6 billion children.

Some children were able to learn remotely while their school was closed and have since returned to their classroom, but our snapshot survey of 96 schools in Afghanistan indicates that significant numbers of children – including girls, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children – are still out of school as a result of the consequences of the pandemic.

In August 2020, the Taliban took power and reclaimed the capital. It is uncertain what this will mean for children's education, particularly girls. This research took place before the Taliban take over but in the midst of the ongoing conflict.

**We must act now and invest in getting the world's children safely back to school, to ensure that a generation of the most vulnerable children do not get left behind.**

**Figure 1: Which children are out of School?**





## Key findings

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### **More than 6 in 10 children at the schools we surveyed have not returned to school**

- 62% of children enrolled at the schools we surveyed before the pandemic, have dropped out
- In a few of the schools that we surveyed, more than 1,000 students had dropped out since the pandemic
- More than half the schools we surveyed said that some enrolled children are not actually attending
- 94% of schools said there are children in their community who could be attending school, but are not

### **More than half the children who have dropped out of the schools we surveyed are girls**

- 54% of the students who have dropped out of the schools we surveyed are girls
- In a small number of the schools we surveyed, more than 1,000 girls have dropped out
- Most of the schools we surveyed (60%) said that girls are more likely than boys to be out of school

### **Children of labourers, migrants and refugees, and married girls, are most likely to be out of school**

According to the schools we surveyed, the children most likely to be out of school are:

- Children whose parents work long hours or migrant labourers (school may be too expensive or children may work instead)
- Children of migrant and refugee families
- Girls who have married early

- Children living in rural areas (school may be too far away to access without transportation)
- Children with a disability (or with a parent with a disability).

### **COVID caused schools to close, but fear of catching or spreading the virus is not the main reason why children are still out of school**

The schools we surveyed said that the main barriers to children attending school are more likely to be:

- Their family has relocated, or it is too far/too expensive to travel to school
- They are working to help their family
- They have married
- They are looking after their parents and/or their siblings
- There are limited places in school or a lack of teachers (particularly female teachers).

Only a small number of schools said that COVID-related factors such as a lack of personal protective equipment, quarantining, or fear of catching the virus, were one of the main barriers to children returning to school.

## Getting children safely back to school

Save the Children's biggest global priority right now is getting children safely back to school, because we know that when a child misses out on their education, it can have a devastating impact on their health, their safety and their future life chances.

**Children that are already vulnerable and disadvantaged – including girls, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children – are at the greatest risk of being left even further behind.**

And to stop this tragedy, the schools we surveyed said that to get children back to school, we need more community awareness campaigns; more teachers (especially female teachers), more community-based education (CBE),<sup>3</sup> and better transport and school infrastructure:

*“Provide female teachers for girls, arrange transportation for female teachers from other communities, extend the CBE classes to grade 12 and establish new classes in rural areas.”*

Staff member at a primary school in Dehsabz, Afghanistan

## What we are calling for

- **Governments and donors invest substantially** in education now, so we can build better education systems for the future.
- All children can continue to learn while schools are closed, through **inclusive distance learning**.
- **Every child is supported to return to school** when it is safe to do so.
- The **most vulnerable and marginalised children are prioritised** including girls, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children.
- **Collection and ongoing tracking of national and global data** on how many children are out of school, to enable timely and targeted action.
- **Within Afghanistan**, more ‘back to school’ campaigns for parents and the community, recruitment of more female teachers, more community-based education, and improvements to transport and school infrastructure.

### A note about using this data

Gathering detailed data on how many children are out of school at any one time is a complex task, particularly in vulnerable contexts. In light of the urgent need to get the world's children safely back to school as soon as possible, we carried out a small-scale, light-touch survey to quickly gather indicative information that will act as a foundation for more detailed data collection and future programme interventions.

The findings reflect what is happening in the schools we surveyed and will help us to tell the story about how many children are out of school and why, so that we can provide support, fundraise and advocate to get millions of children safely back to school. However, the findings are not representative of all children and should not be scaled up to describe the situation nationally or globally.

### Get in touch

**It's not too late to make a difference.**

For more information or to discuss how you can support our essential work to get millions of children safely back to school, please get in touch with:

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<sup>1</sup> Children who are out of school include those who have dropped out (not enrolled) or have enrolled but are not attending

<sup>2</sup> From May – July 2021, Save the Children carried out a survey with 96 schools that had fully or partially reopened in Afghanistan, to gather information about how many children were out of school, who they were, and the reasons why they had not returned or dropped out. Data was collected online, face to face and by phone via Kobo.

<sup>3</sup> Community-based education means non-government funded classes provided by NGOs, usually held in community buildings or homes.