



COUNTRY BRIEFING: AFGHANISTAN



GEC-T	2 projects	73,430 target beneficiaries
LNGB	1 project	5,797 target beneficiaries

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) has three projects working in Afghanistan to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for over 80,000 of the country's marginalised girls.

Implementation across all three Afghanistan projects centres around community-based education (CBE). This is a community-led and NGO-supported approach to offer formally accredited education to girls in rural and peri urban areas, spanning 17 regions of Afghanistan. Two of the projects operate under the GEC-T window which aims to support girls to transition from primary education into lower secondary and secondary education. The third project is under the Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) window and focuses on supporting the most marginalised and vulnerable girls who have little to no primary education to attend accelerated primary schooling or to gain the literacy and numeracy skills to transition to further opportunities, including formal schooling, vocational training and other livelihoods opportunities.

Between July and September 2020, projects directly reached 25,378 girls despite obstacles such as travel restrictions, school closures and limited access to technology. This has been critical during a period which has brought increased risks to girls' health, security, wellbeing and learning.

PROJECT NAME	WINDOW	PROJECT START DATE	PROJECT CLOSE DATE
<u>Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES)</u>	GEC-T	1 April 2017	31 March 2021
<u>Steps Towards Afghan Girls Education Success (STAGES)</u>	LNGB	30 August 2019	1 March 2022
<u>Community-Based Education for Marginalised Girls in Afghanistan (CBE for MGA)</u>	GEC-T	1 April 2017	30 Dec 2022

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Project data is based on reporting from May to October 2020

Since the start of the second phase of the GEC¹ (2017-2025), projects in Afghanistan have reported the following achievements up to June 2020:

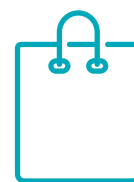


15,969
teachers trained

3,000
girls club
leaders trained



1,127,641
textbooks distributed



1,154,905
student kits
distributed

Achievements

- **STAGES** registered a 94% attendance rate at community-based classes (against a target of 91%), which is an increase from 87% at the outset of the project, and also saw an increase of 20% in religious and community leaders actively mobilising households to support excluded girls into education since the outset of the project. This has been achieved through conversations with parents, particularly fathers, about delaying girls' marriage or allowing married girls to attend school. Overall, girls demonstrated improved literacy and numeracy skills, and outperformed comparison schools on numeracy and the proportion of girls' reporting self-reading.
- **CBE-MGA** demonstrated progress in girls' leadership skills which can be attributed to an effective mentoring programme. Girls' learning levels increased and the project-supported girls consistently perform higher than the government school comparison group.

Challenges

Schools across Afghanistan have been closed since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is keeping girls learning during this time has been a huge challenge. The country's Ministry of Education (MoE) developed guidelines for "Alternative Education Services" which included self-learning, distance learning (via TV and/or radio), and small group learning. However, alternative learning pathways were not easily accessible for some of the most marginalised girls. Girls may not get much support at home with learning. For example, **STAGES** conducted a Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA) to inform their response activities and found that 39% of girls do not receive any support with learning at home. Furthermore, the majority of the girls do not have internet access, televisions or radios to aid their home learning. Efforts to track girls and maintain data on their learning have been hindered by being unable to reach them. The RGA showed that during the crisis, strict lockdown rules left girls much more at risk of gender-based violence and poverty, and being stuck at home led to increased chore burden for girls, and heightened levels of anxiety and depression. The crisis has also exacerbated issues of insecurity, active conflict and crime rates, and projects are facing increasing pressure from Armed Opposition Groups who are threatening girls' access to education.

¹ The first phase of the GEC ran from 2012-2017 and provided quality education for over a million marginalised girls. The GEC is now in its second phase (2017-2025), with up to 41 projects in 17 countries. The second phase is enabling existing GEC beneficiary girls to complete primary school and transition to secondary education, technical vocational training or employment. Within the second phase, a second cohort of girls are also being supported through the Leave No Girl Behind funding window, which consists of interventions for highly marginalised, adolescent girls who are out of school.



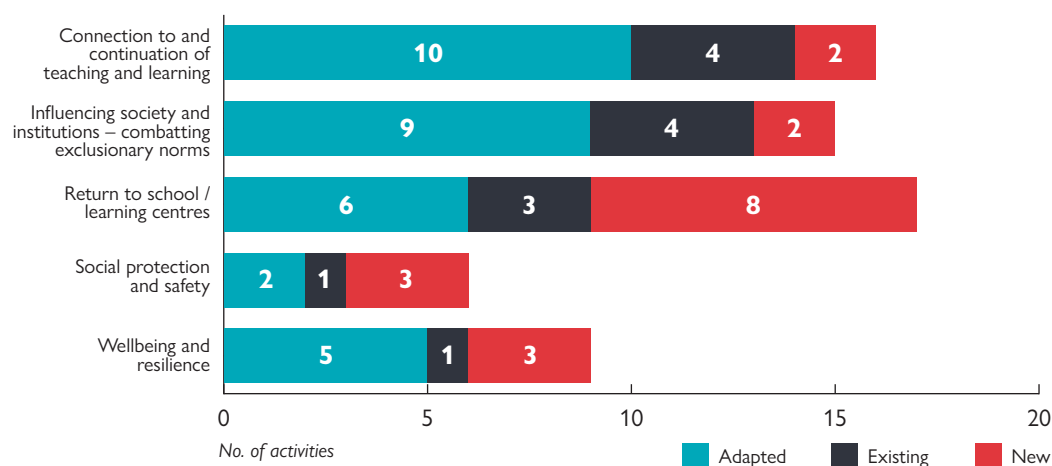
Recent highlights

In response to the challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic, GEC projects in Afghanistan have developed plans with activities designed to best support girls to continue learning as well as supporting their safety and wellbeing. *Figure 1* outlines the types of activities projects have implemented and indicates the proportion of these that are existing, adapted or completely new activities to projects. Some highlights from these activities include:

- **Keeping in contact with girls:** Between July and September 2020 a total of 25,378 girls were reached directly across the projects in Afghanistan. **STAGES** provided teachers with phone credit in order to contact students on a weekly basis by phone. Where girls did not have access to mobile phones or networks, teachers and/or shura members provided house-to-house support for around 1,617 students (i.e. instruction, home study mentoring, safeguarding messages). **CBE-MGA** similarly organised one-to-one sessions and small group discussions adhering to social distancing guidelines and using PPE.
- **Keeping girls learning:** As there is low proliferation of technology in the GEC project areas in Afghanistan, all projects have provided teaching and learning support through community-based education and face-to-face tutoring where possible. Additionally, **CBE-MGA** broadcast 46 educational feature programmes by radio and **STAGES** supported teachers to contact students by phone to support them with remote learning. **CBE-MGA** also established learning hubs to link students with expert teachers in core subjects (maths, science and English) to provide additional support to prevent students from falling behind.
- **Ensuring girls' safety, health and wellbeing:** To support girls' health and wellbeing, **STAGES** distributed 15,139 health and hygiene kits to girls, and they have shared helpline phone numbers to teachers and students, and expect increased use of such hotlines as COVID-19 continues.
- **Providing economic support:** **CBE-MGA** has supported girls whose families are facing financial distress, providing stipends to 1,867 girls in hub schools across 10 provinces in Afghanistan.
- **Supporting the return to schools:** As schools have begun to reopen in Afghanistan since October 2020, the projects are now supporting girls to return to schools and learning centres, monitoring dropout rates and supporting schools and learning centres with safety and hygiene measures while the virus remains a risk.

All projects have put in place safeguarding protocols and procedures specifically to ensure that their COVID-19 responses are safe for girls, other beneficiaries and staff members. Safety, as well as learning, continues to be a top priority for all GEC projects.*

Figure 1: COVID-19 Response activities in Afghanistan²



* Please see the safeguarding section on the COVID-19 page of the GEC website for materials and guidance provided to projects: <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/#/article/covid-19-response>. The GEC expects our projects to be compliant with our 14 minimum standards on safeguarding.

² Projects began implementing the COVID-19 response activities in Q2 2020 and will continue or be adapted in accordance with the evolving COVID-19 situation in each context and in agreement with the FM.

Coordination and collaboration

- Projects have been working closely with the Education in Emergencies Working Group and are using the remote learning materials developed by the group, which helps to align materials across projects, and keeps the projects engaged in policy decisions around education in Afghanistan. **STAGES** and **CBE-MGA** are also part of the Community-Based Education working group of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Afghanistan who regularly share teaching and learning materials. **CBE-MGA** shared their COVID-19 project activities plan with the MoE for feedback which has helped feed into and align activities to the MoE's response strategy. Projects also work closely with NGOs operating in Afghanistan and have held regular coordination meetings to share experiences from different regions and align strategies in their COVID-19 response activities.

Lessons learned

- Key to achieving the aim of GEC-T projects – to support girls to transition to the next levels of education – is sustainability beyond their project life cycle. Projects in Afghanistan have found that supporting community-based schools to become government or community-owned requires effective communication, advocacy and coordination with local authorities to provide schools with the resources they require to continue past the project end date.
- One innovation which has worked well is a teacher phone hotline that upper secondary, community-based girls could use. Following feedback and review, the intervention is being adapted further so that the hotline connects the girls with their main teachers whom they know well, rather than any teacher working at the hotline at the time.

Priorities from January 2021

- The Afghanistan government announced in early October 2020 that schools and community-based education centres would reopen, and so projects are now conducting back-to-school campaigns while monitoring and analysing drop-out rates, re-enrolment and learning levels.
- In this acute phase, projects are focused on monitoring the retention and transition of girls through the education system.
- Projects will continue COVID-19 response activities while the case numbers and risks to project staff and girls remain.
- Projects will have a renewed focus on sustainability in 2021 including agreeing revised sustainability plans.
- Safeguarding remains a critical issue and will be a continued focus for the projects.



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