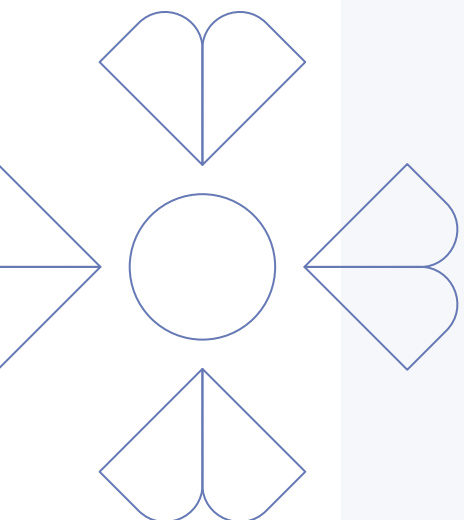




GIRLS' EDUCATION AND COVID-19 IN

PAKISTAN

NOVEMBER 2020
Summary report





FOREWORD

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the already acute girls' education crisis in Pakistan. Poverty, gender and marginalisation have intersected to accentuate inequalities, making it harder than ever for girls from poorer, rural households to learn. If leaders don't act now, these girls may never return to school.

In *Girls' education and COVID-19 in Pakistan*, Malala Fund and our Education Champions highlight the impact of school closures on students in all four provinces with an emphasis on girls' experiences. The report details the pandemic's dire effects on household finances and how this economic crisis has the potential to prevent even more girls from completing their education.

Malala Fund's Education Champions in Pakistan work across all four provinces to increase girls' access to education. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, they have been fighting to break down the barriers to distance learning outlined in this report and to protect progress for girls' education.

As schools begin to reopen, Malala Fund and our Education Champions are now focused on ensuring that girls are safely able to return to the classroom.

In the pages that follow, Malala Fund and our Education Champions lay out a roadmap for how government officials at all levels can ensure the safe, gender-responsive reopening of schools, alleviate the economic effects of the pandemic to help families prioritise education, protect education gains and build back Pakistan's education system with gender at the centre to promote inclusive growth and ensure every girl can learn.

Girls are paying the highest price of the pandemic. By taking immediate action and following the recommendations in this report, leaders can mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and ensure that every girl in Pakistan is able to learn during and after this crisis.

Moiz Hussain
*In-Country
Representative, Pakistan
Malala Fund*

Ziauddin Yousafzai
*Co-Founder
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

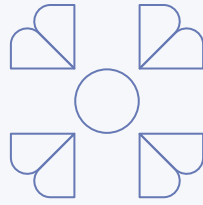


In the summer of 2020, Malala Fund and our Education Champions conducted a survey to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted school-going children and their families in Pakistan.

The survey sought to identify impacts across four provinces, looking at both less-populated interior districts and high-density urban centres. While the data illuminated differences by region, certain overall trends also emerged. First and foremost, both girls and boys remain committed to their education, despite reporting major difficulties accessing distance learning during lockdown. Girls also described additional obstacles to learning. For example, they were much more likely than boys to have to spend time on chores and care work, which interfered with time available for studying. They also reported much less time spent on leisure activities than their male counterparts.

The pandemic has severely impacted household finances, and people across all four provinces reported a lack of support from the government. The resulting economic crisis has the potential to further limit girls' educational opportunities. Already, COVID-19 has widened existing educational inequalities in Pakistan, particularly affecting girls in more marginalised areas and poorer households. The survey shows that these girls face the greatest challenges when it comes to returning to school.

But it is not too late to take action to improve the educational prospects of Pakistan's children, especially girls.



Our full list of recommendations begins on page 23. At a high level, we are calling upon federal and provincial governments to:

1

Ensure gender-responsive reopenings

Reopen schools safely and address in plans girls' needs and the harmful effects of gender norms and roles.

2

Mitigate economic effects

Mitigate the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis with social protection measures and help families prioritise education.

3

Protect progress

Protect progress for girls' education and rebuild the education system with gender at the centre to promote inclusive growth and ensure every girl can learn.



1. RESEARCH PROCESS



This report presents findings from a rapid assessment that the Pakistan chapter of the Malala Fund Education Champions Network conducted in July and August 2020, complemented by a desk review of policies and relevant literature.

The goal of this research was to better understand the ways in which the pandemic has impacted students and their families in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on girls.



1.1 Methodology

In July and August 2020 Malala Fund and its partners surveyed a sample of 1,598 households through both door-to-door (48%) and telephone (52%) interview survey methods.¹ Within each household, interviewers spoke with one parent and one child (where permission was granted). Here is a summary of the sample:

- **The survey participants included 1,600 adults and 1,592 children.**
- **Of the children that parents/guardians gave permission to speak, 65% were boys.²**
- **Students' grade levels ranged from below grade four to grade 12.**
- **61% of households had three or more children.**
- **67% of households were entirely dependent on the informal economy for income and 41% of households had at least one member as a homemaker/unpaid domestic worker.**

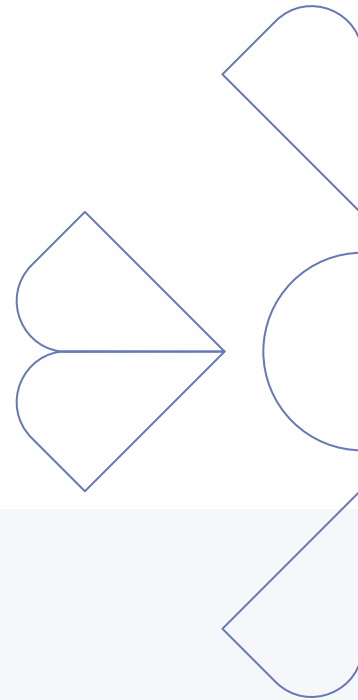
Household profiles were reasonably typical of working families in less affluent parts of Pakistan. For more details on the survey and respondent profile, see [Appendix](#).

1.2 Limitations

Researchers administered the majority of questionnaires by phone, in observance of COVID-19 safety guidance.

As this was a rapid assessment without opportunity for follow-up psychosocial or legal support, the survey did not include direct questions

about sensitive issues like early and forced marriage or gender-based violence. However, media reports and other research point to a surge in rates of all these, each of which has the potential to impact girls' education.





2. CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

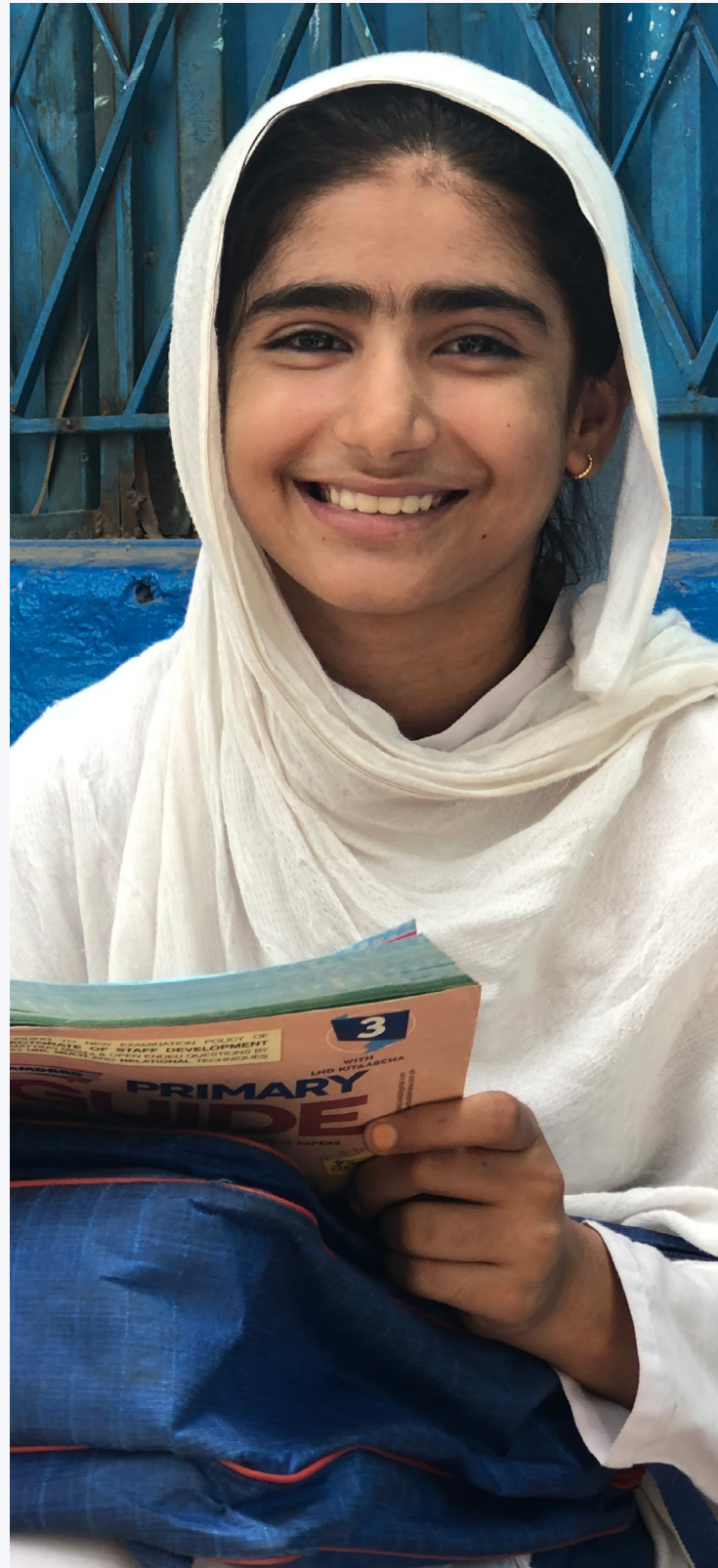




2.1 Education before COVID-19

Despite some recent progress, Pakistan was struggling to educate millions of children before the pandemic hit. Chronic underfunding had put strain on the education system, creating the following entrenched inequalities:

- 1 **There were persistent and large gender disparities in enrolment at all levels.³**
- 2 **Harmful gender norms pushed many girls out of school.⁴**
- 3 **The quality of education was poor and learning outcomes were weak.⁵**
- 4 **There were teacher shortages; in particular, marginalised areas lacked female teachers.⁶**
- 5 **Federal and provincial governments did not invest enough in schools and underutilised available funds.⁷**





2.2 Education: COVID-19 response timeline

Here is a timeline of key dates related to Pakistan's COVID-19 response in 2020 and its impact on schools:





3. SURVEY ON COVID-19, EDUCATION & GENDER



3.1 Poverty influences students' prospects of returning to school

Overall, 82% of girls and 79% of boys surveyed said that they intended to return to school when schools reopen – but there were significant variances by location, household income and grade level.



“We were happy in school before COVID.”

– Aleena, grade five*

Girls from more marginalised communities and/or poorer households tended to be the least optimistic about returning to school:

- In all provinces except Balochistan, girls and boys living in interior districts were less certain of returning to school than those in urban areas.
- Girls living in the interior districts of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were less likely than boys in those areas to say they would definitely return.
- However in Balochistan, girls living in urban centres were five times more likely to report that they were not sure they would return to school than those in interior districts.

Students from households where both parents worked in the informal sector were also more uncertain about returning to school.

Finally, students' expectations about returning to school post-lockdown varied by grade level:

- Girls and boys in grade four and below were most likely to report that they would not return to school once it reopens.
- Girls who had just joined secondary to higher secondary were also more likely not to expect to return.
- At the point of transition from secondary to higher secondary, there was a decline in the proportion of boys who reported they will definitely be returning to school.

*Indicates pseudonym.

Return to school by gender and province

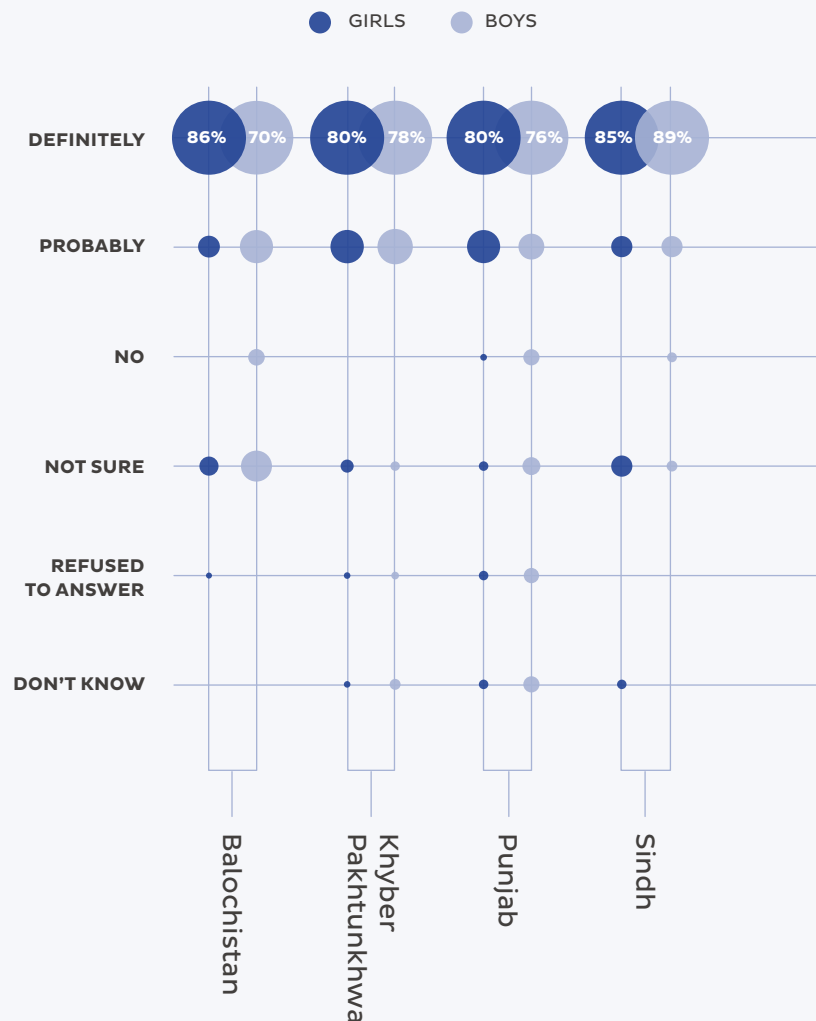


FIGURE 1

Return to school by type of employment

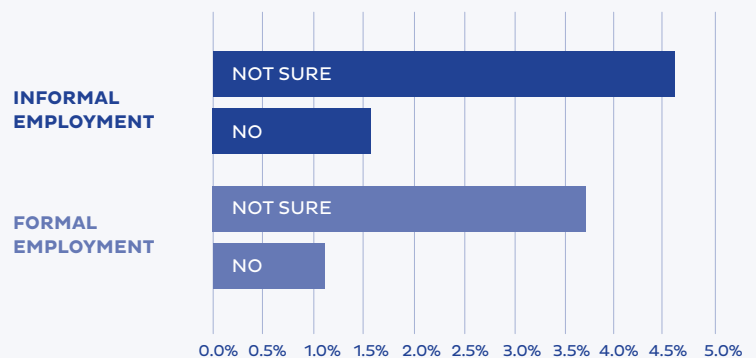


FIGURE 2



3.2 COVID-19 has added further economic stress to poorer households

In addition to school closures, the financial impact of COVID-19 further jeopardises students' education prospects.

The largest share of respondents reported experiencing a cash crunch that began at the onset of lockdown.

A large number of households surveyed relied to some extent on income from the informal sector, work that lockdowns and social distancing measures often made nearly impossible.

Length of experience of cash crunch and food insecurity



FIGURE 3

Likelihood of reporting cash crunch and food insecurity by type of employment

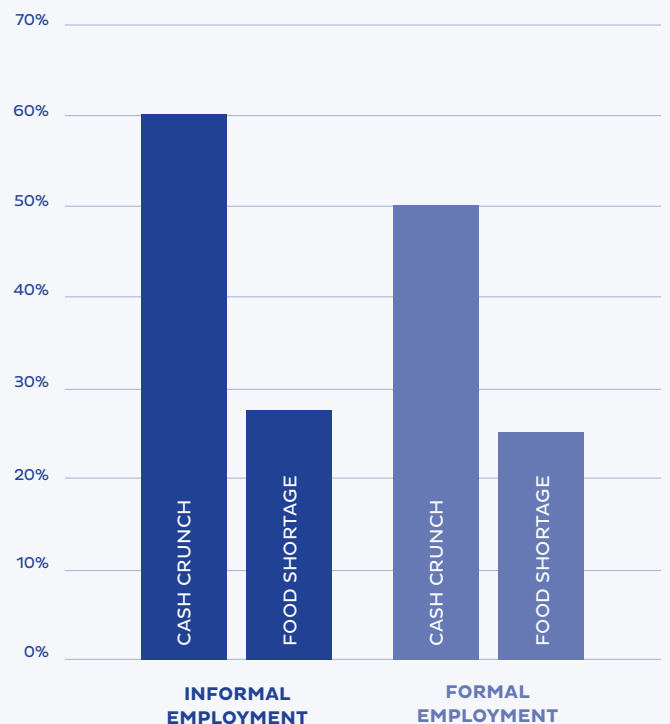


FIGURE 4



The survey revealed dire financial circumstances among households surveyed:

- **57% of adults reported facing financial difficulties during the pandemic.**
- **Only 25% felt they had sufficient employment opportunities where they live.**
- **27% stated that they did not have enough food at home, employing various coping strategies to manage.**
- **People dependent on informal employment were more likely to report cash crunches and food shortages than those with formal jobs.**
- **In Balochistan, households in interior districts were more than twice as likely to report facing a cash crunch than households in urban areas.**
- **Punjab is the only province where households in urban areas were more likely to report facing a cash crunch (by 7%).**

- **The cash crunch hit respondents from our sample in Sindh the worst, with 72% of households reporting that they are facing some difficulties compared to 50% in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 57% in Punjab.**
- **In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, respondents from households in interior districts were more likely to report facing food shortages compared to households in urban areas. The inverse was true in the other provinces.**
- **Respondents from households in the urban areas of Punjab were almost twice as likely to report facing food insecurity when compared to those in interior districts (19% compared to 34%).**

Despite the evident severity of the situation, very few respondents reported receiving assistance to support their livelihoods.

Receipt of assistance, cash or help during lockdown

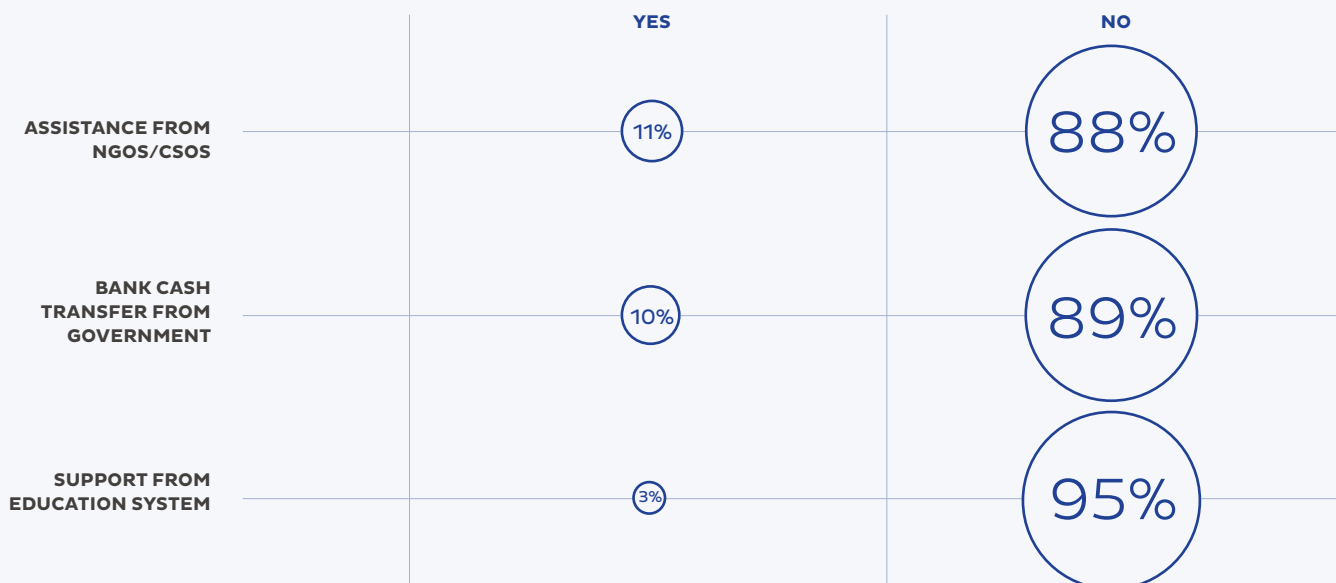


FIGURE 5



3.3 School closures have compromised learning

Both girls and boys were struggling to access or use the government-provided forms of learning support during the lockdown.

Girls were overcoming odds to spend time on studying, despite social norm pressures around how they spent their time and lower access to some forms of technology than boys.

Uptake of distance learning provisions

Government support for distance learning principally relied on TV, radio and e-learning, but these methods did not appear to be reaching students. Although the majority of respondents (67%) said they had a TV at home and around one-third had radio, only 20% of girls and boys were spending time on educational TV and just 2% on educational radio.

Access to smartphones was fairly high (60%), but three-quarters of those with access reported only being able to afford data intermittently. Fewer girls (59%) than boys (68%) reported being able to access smartphones. Girls were almost 40% more likely than boys to say that they never have access to a mobile device and their most frequently cited reason for not accessing a phone was being afraid to ask. Less than 1% of students were using ed tech for distance learning.

Child's access to household mobile devices

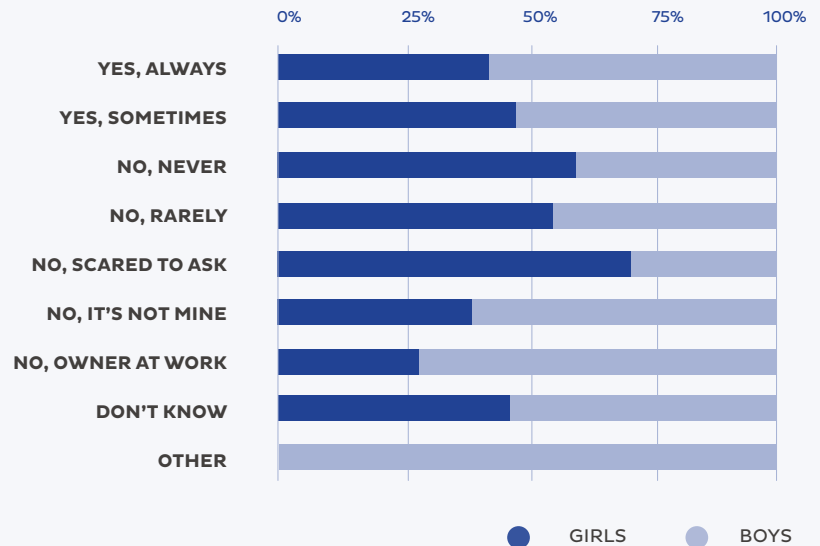


FIGURE 6

The majority of students said that they wanted to receive printed educational materials (such as postcards or books). They **estimated that they would spend around two hours a day on studying from these**, compared with about five to six hours of timetabled lessons at school. **However, less than 5% of households reported receiving help of any kind directly from school or the education system.** Those who did receive support were more likely to receive assistance for livelihoods (e.g., food and cash) than educational material.

“Life was better before lockdown, because life is balanced if you are going to school on a daily basis.”

– Sanaya, grade five*

*Indicates pseudonym.



Activity patterns by gender

Respondents could give more than one response on how they spend their time

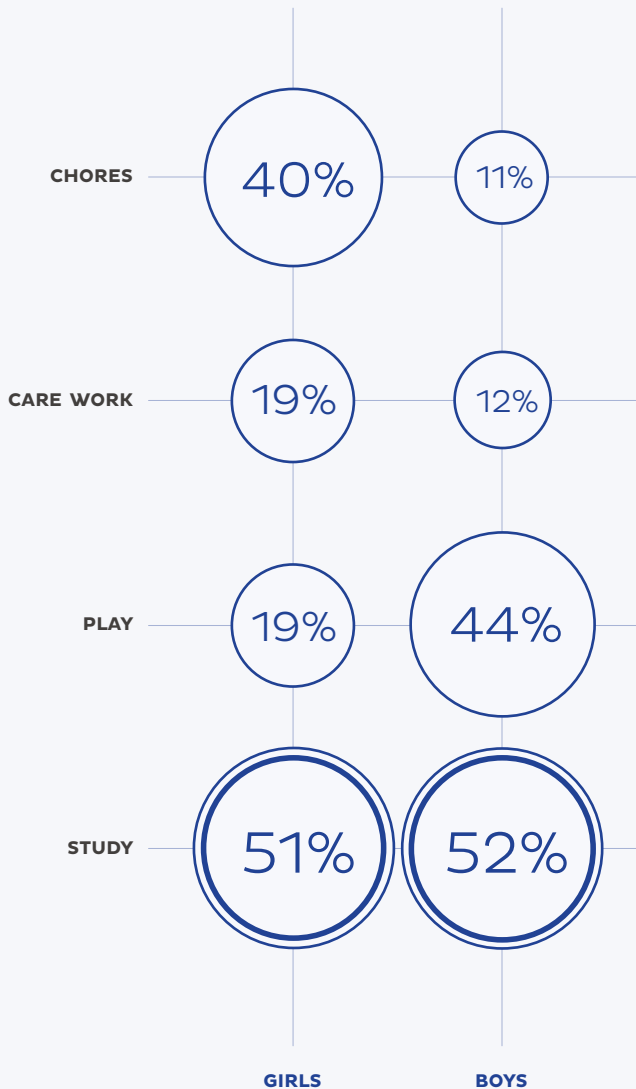


FIGURE 7

Time use

The survey revealed that during lockdown, girls and boys spent their time differently. Girls were much more likely to report spending time on chores and care work, while boys were more likely to report spending time on leisure activities such as playing with friends. Boys were marginally more likely than girls to report time spent on studying, but encouragingly this was the most frequently-cited activity for both.

Deeper analysis shows gendered time use patterns at a provincial level. Some striking findings include:

- Boys were more likely than girls to report spending time on study in every province except Sindh. The differences were starkest in Balochistan (20%) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (11%).
- In Punjab girls were nine times more likely than boys to report spending time on chores. The proportion of girls to boys reporting the same was five times higher in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and four times in Balochistan. In Sindh, it was higher by almost 42%.
- In Balochistan the proportion of boys who reported spending time playing was just over double that of girls. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab it rose to around four times and in Sindh it was 36% higher.

“No school, no study, only housework.”

— Maira, grade nine*

*Indicates pseudonym.



Support for learning

Both girls and boys cited family as the greatest source of learning support during lockdown. While welcome, this has the potential to reproduce educational inequalities, given low levels of parental education in Pakistan generally.

Girls were slightly more likely than boys to report getting help from within the household or from a private tutor. Boys, on the other hand, were more likely than girls to get help from friends and neighbours and to use ed tech, a finding that likely reflects social norms affording boys greater freedom to spend time outside their home and greater access to technology.

A significant proportion of girls and boys reported receiving no help with learning at all during lockdown. Somewhat surprisingly, fewer girls than boys said they were not getting help from anyone.

Deeper analysis revealed distinctions at the provincial level revealed:

- **In Balochistan girls were 43% less likely to report receiving learning assistance from their fathers. Girls in Punjab were also marginally less likely to report receiving their assistance.**
- **Access to a private tutor was much higher in Punjab compared to the other provinces. A girl in Punjab was 11 times more likely to report having access to a private tutor than a girl in Balochistan.**
- **Boys reported having slightly higher access to tutors than girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and double the access in Balochistan.**
- **In Sindh the proportion of boys who reported receiving no help was significantly higher than that of girls.**
- **In Balochistan, most respondents reported receiving learning support from at least one member of their family and boys received more of this kind of support.**
- **In Punjab, however, girls were marginally more likely than boys to be receiving no help at all.**

Sources of students' learning support during lockdown

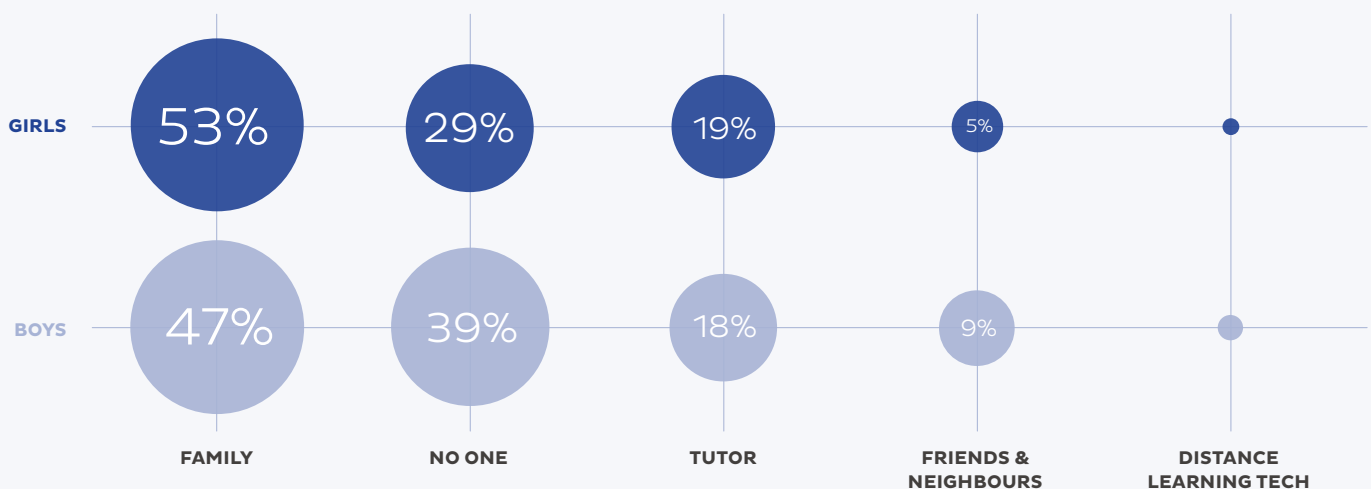


FIGURE 8



Barriers to returning to school

Students who reported that they didn't expect to return to school were asked to give a reason.¹⁸ Girls were more likely to cite withdrawal of parental permission, while boys were more likely to point to the expense of school and the need to earn income for their households.

Provincial-level analysis further illustrates the combined impact of economic stress and social norms on keeping girls from school:

- **In Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, all girls who cited the inability to afford fees as a reason for not returning to school were from households that also reported the experience of a cash crunch.**
- **The sole answer given by girls in Punjab for not returning was that their parents would not allow it. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this comprised only a quarter of the responses given by girls, whereas it comprised 60% of girls' responses in Balochistan.**
- **Respondents in Sindh alone cited a lack of teachers and lack of facilities within schools as a reason for not returning to school.**

Reasons for not returning to school

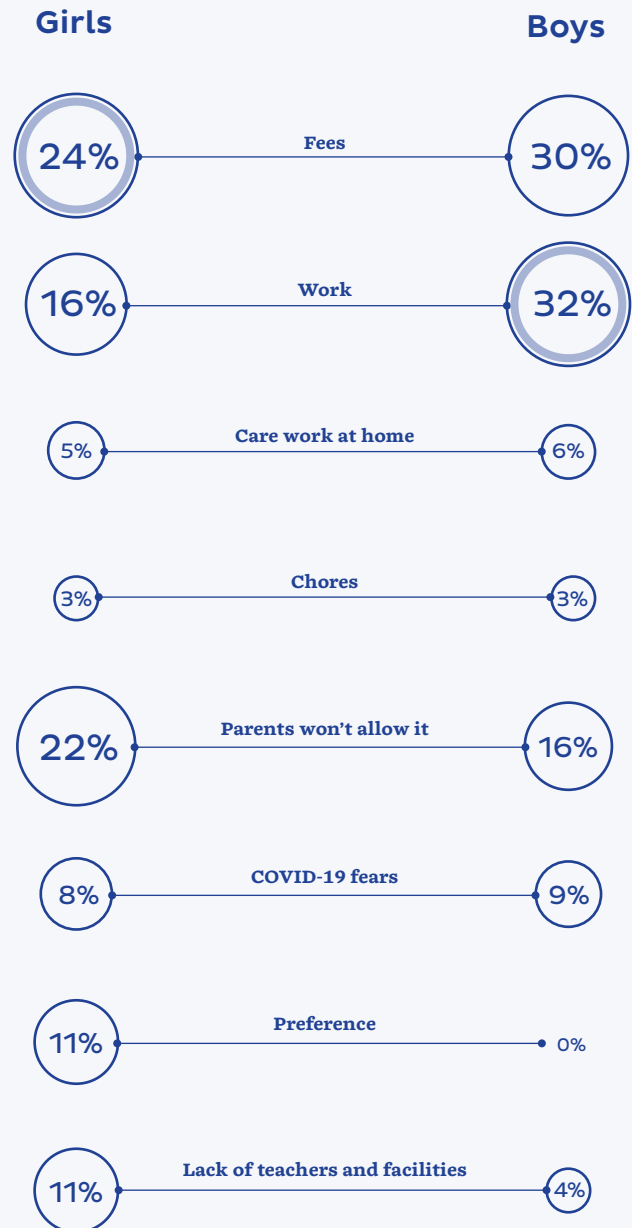


FIGURE 9



4. EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT PROVISIONS



4.1 Distance learning

While federal and provincial governments have introduced a number of remote learning methods, the survey showed that few students accessed e-learning, educational TV and educational radio, probably due to issues with accessing devices, competing demands on time and, in the case of internet access, affordability of data.



The findings echo research on inequalities in media and internet access in Pakistan. For example, while 95% of households in Pakistan own a cell phone, only 34% have access to the internet.¹⁹ And while more households in Pakistan have TVs than radios, those with TVs tend to be wealthier. In Sindh, for example, only 20% of the poorest households have a TV compared to 96% of the wealthiest households.²⁰ Gender norms also likely affect girls' ability to access these forms of distance learning. For example, just 26% of girls and women own a mobile phone compared to 64% of men and boys, and only 6% of rural girls and women reported using the internet in a three-month period compared with 33% of urban men and boys.²¹

Students indicated a desire to receive printed materials but low levels of provision. Media reports confirm that government schools distributed few offline materials and that students of affluent schools were more likely to receive things like take-home workbooks.

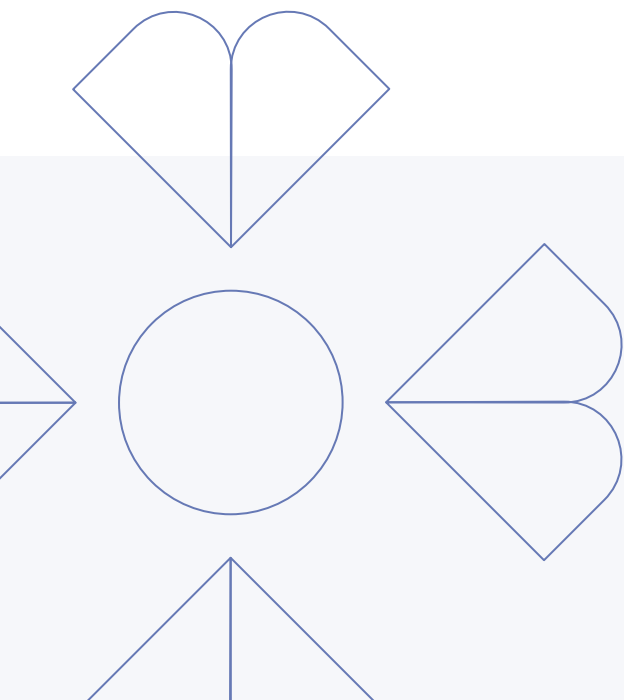
4.2 Bringing girls and boys back to school

While most lockdown restrictions were lifted in August, the government announced a phased school reopening — between 15 and 30 September — to be guided by provincial Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). News reports from late September suggested a number of schools closed shortly after reopening due to non-compliance with the SOPs. Data on reenrolment is not yet available.

The survey results underline that some students are more at risk of dropping out of school than others, particularly those in more marginalised areas. Given how many families are in a state of economic crisis, it will be important to alleviate the economic burdens that threaten reenrolment and retention in school. In particular, the findings echo other research showing that girls in poorer households and other vulnerable groups are likely to face challenges in continuing their education.²²

While the NERRP acknowledges that during a crisis “girls are twice as likely to be out of school and face greater barriers to continuing their education,” analysis reveals the school reopening plan to be relatively gender-blind and lacking in specific guidance or proven interventions to reach more marginalised girls.

To incentivise return to school, governments have put in place some positive strategies, such as automatic grade promotion and are encouraging back-to-school campaigns — but it is unknown at this time whether such campaigns will run at the scale and scope needed to address the challenges.





Encouragingly, all four provinces in Pakistan have well-functioning Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). The government could repurpose these systems to collect individual- and community-level information about children who are more at risk of dropping out, those who aren't able to access home-schooling measures/technology and those in households that have experienced health and/or economic shocks during this emergency. It is not known whether this is happening at present.

Before the pandemic, all four provinces ran stipend programmes for female students in select districts who were enrolled at the middle and secondary levels in government school. However, only Khyber Pakhtunkhwa announced a targeted programme to encourage female attendance at schools post-COVID-19. Preexisting stipend programmes also have a relatively low reach, with the Punjab stipend programme reaching fewer than 400,000 girls. These programmes may need to be expanded and the stipend raised (even if as a one-time measure) to increase the likelihood of girls returning to school.

4.3 Supporting livelihoods

The survey reveals the desperate financial straits facing many households in Pakistan during the pandemic, especially those dependent on the informal economy for income and those in more marginalised districts. Economic stress is known to be a major factor in pushing girls and boys out of school.²³ Social protection is thus vital, but very few households in the survey were benefiting from income support or other assistance with livelihoods.

The NERRP recommended providing “targeted support to poor households through cash grants and stipends for learners” to allow vulnerable students to continue remote learning and mitigate the risk of dropout once schools reopen. The EEC approach, however, has limitations in meeting citizens' immediate needs. For example, the amount of the transfer is

only a small portion of daily consumption: covering only 15 Pakistani rupees of the estimated 410 Pakistani rupees daily consumption for the poorest 40% of the population in Pakistan.^{24 25 26}

While starting the EEC rollout with 4.5 million women already receiving payments through Kafaalat was a positive step in ensuring women would receive needed financial support, the wider EEC programme may risk unintended consequences of reinforcing gender inequality in the country. Apart from this earmarked portion women will face an uphill battle for access to the other 13.5 million slots, as no other slots are guaranteed to women.²⁷ The current rollout strategy may further inhibit women from accessing grants given that it relies on mobile phone registrations and requires a national ID to register.²⁸





4.4 Resourcing the system

Already struggling with limited financing — with budgetary allocations to education accounting for only 2% of GDP — the additional demands placed on the education system by COVID-19 have placed extra strain on resources. However, far from providing the cash needed to meet the needs for the phased reopening of schools in September, the government has actually rerouted funds. The annual budget, announced in June, did not include any special grants or emergency provisions for COVID-19 related expenditures for the education sector.





5. RECOMMENDATIONS



Our research highlights the depth and scale of the educational challenges facing girls and boys in Pakistan.

School closures, combined with economic stress and social norms, have created a perfect storm for Pakistan's students. Girls in more marginalised communities and poorer households are most at risk of dropping out or falling behind in their learning.

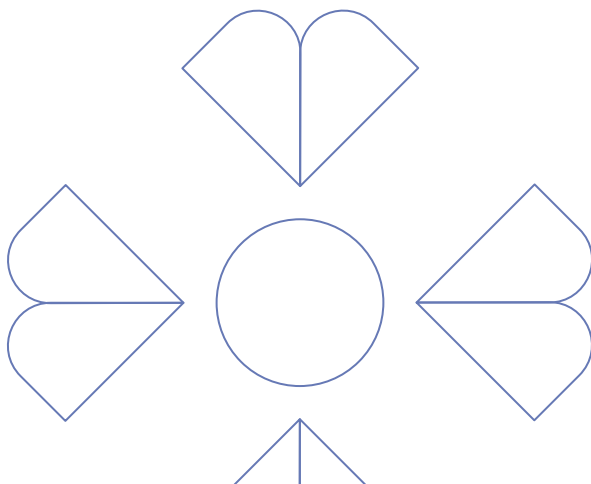
Actors at all levels can help, but ultimately the government – at federal and provincial levels – must take the lead.



1

Ensure safe and gender-responsive school reopenings.

- Refer to the UNESCO COVID-19 Global Education Coalition guide's *Building back equal: Girls back to school* to take gender-responsive actions on learning, health/nutrition/WASH, protection and teachers.²⁹
- Ministries of education should develop targeted remedial and catch-up learning support to marginalised girls and other vulnerable groups, following *Teaching at the Right Level* approaches to develop foundational skills.³⁰
- Provincial governments should provide technical, human-resource capacity and financial support to schools management committees to engage with households in their catchment areas to identify at-risk girls and work to secure their return to school.
- Girls Back to School campaigns should be accompanied by commensurate actions to retain girls in school, making schools immediately COVID-safe whilst developing longer-term plans to address supply-side issues such as school construction, hiring of teachers (especially female) and increasing the availability of gender-sensitive teaching and learning materials.
- Scale up existing, education-specific conditional cash transfers or stipends specifically targeting girls and at-risk groups to encourage reenrolment.





2

Mitigate the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis to help families prioritise education.

- Scale up social protection, ensuring it is targeted to the most vulnerable groups, including girls, students with special needs or disabilities and those in lower socioeconomic and conflict-affected states to help mitigate negative coping strategies that could impact reenrolment.

3

Protect progress for girls' education and rebuild the education system with gender at the centre to promote inclusive growth and ensure every girl can learn.

- Provide gender-equitable and inclusive distance learning to support all students for future school closures.
- Management information systems should collect gender-disaggregated data on reenrolment and retention. Data should be publicly available, disaggregated at the provincial level and used to inform changes to policy and practice.
- Immediately reverse the declining trend in the development budget and commit to maintaining and eventually increasing public spending on education through prioritising education as part of the recovery plan.
- Establish emergency financing packages for education.
- Ensure that disaster risk preparedness strategies are gender-responsive, particularly in regard to education.
- Ensure the revised curriculum supports the goal of advancing gender equality in wider society, for example, by confronting gender stereotypes and providing girls with role models.





Methodological note

This study was conducted in partnership with organisations with presence in the selected regions, therefore sampling was purposive. The survey was conducted between the months of July and August 2020. 48% of interviews were carried out in person and 52% of them were telephonic. Researchers spoke to households in two parts. First, researchers spoke to a parent or guardian within the household and then sought their permission to speak to a child from within the same household. They asked parents questions pertaining to: (i) their social and demographic profile, (ii) the impact of COVID-19 closures on the economic status of the family and (iii) the receipt of support from governments

and civil society. Researchers spoke to children about their: (i) educational profile, (ii) access to and use of technology, (iii) continuation of learning during lockdown and (iv) time use. While the data gathered was mostly quantitative, some qualitative data was collected as pertains to perceptions of quality of life during lockdown.

Following ethical guidelines, researchers did not ask questions regarding gender-based violence as we could not ensure mechanisms for safeguarding.

Enumerators collected the data and recorded it in an Excel database. Malala Fund then cleaned and analysed the data using Excel and Tableau.

Profile of respondents

	GIRLS	BOYS
BELOW GRADE FIVE	8.24%	7.30%
GRADE FIVE	16.13%	14.79%
GRADE SIX	14.52%	16.34%
GRADE SEVEN	14.70%	12.06%
GRADE EIGHT	14.87%	13.52%
GRADE NINE	10.39%	14.30%
GRADE 10	13.08%	12.35%
GRADE 11	3.23%	3.31%
GRADE 12	4.84%	6.03%



APPENDIX

Profile of respondents

PROVINCES		BALUCHISTAN	KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA	PUNJAB	SINDH	AVERAGE
RURAL/URBAN	RURAL	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25%
	URBAN	12.5%	25.0%	0.0%	12.5%	12.50%
	PERI-URBAN	62.5%	50.0%	75.0%	62.5%	62.50%
CHILDREN'S GENDER	FEMALE	60.60%	57.50%	54.90%	31.30%	52%
	MALE	39.40%	42.50%	25.10%	68.70%	48%
DISTRICTS COVERED		Awaran, Gwadar, Kech, Khuzdar, Lasbela, Panjgur, Quetta and Washuk	Abbottabad, Charsadda, Karak, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Swabi and Swat	Chiniot, D.G Khan, Faisalabad, Jhang, Layyah, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur and Toba Tek Singh	Badin, Larkana, Matiari, Sukkur, Shaheed Benazir Abad, Tando M. Khan, Tharparkar and Umerkot	50 respondents/ district



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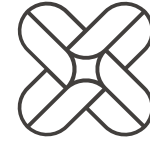
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Most of all, we thank the young people and their parents who participated and shared their experiences during a challenging and uncertain time.



**EDUCATION
CHAMPION
NETWORK
PAKISTAN**

The Pakistan chapter of the Malala Fund Education Champion Network is a national cohort of educators and activists who advocate for policy and programmatic solutions to ensure that all girls can have access to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.

Through our Education Champion Network, Malala Fund supports the work of local leaders in Afghanistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Pakistan and Turkey who understand challenges in their communities and are best placed to identify, innovate and advocate for progress towards girls' secondary education around the world.



ENDNOTES

1. Researchers asked parents questions about the effects of COVID-19 on their livelihood and asked children about their access to technology, continuation of learning during the lockdown period and their expectations of return to school after lockdown.
2. Since all data in this report is presented in proportionate terms, boys' views are not over-represented.
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