

## **Afghan Province Sees More Women Teachers**

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Development seen as a long-overdue boost for improving girls' education.

**By Akmal Zahir**

The number of female teachers working in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar has significantly grown over the last two years, according to local officials.

But conservative traditions as well as a scarcity of jobs mean that large numbers of women who graduate from teacher training college do not go on to work in their chosen field.

There are currently 1,400 female teachers working in Nangarhar, according to data provided by the local department of education, up from 1,000 in 2014.

Meena Sherzad, head of the Allayi High school in Jalalabad's fourth district, said that the changing ratio of male to female teachers was already making itself felt.

"Day by day the number of female teachers has been rising, which is good news for the development and improvement of the whole teaching process," she said. "I want families to let their daughters start teaching and so train many more girls in this country."

There are 902 schools in Nangarhar, serving some 820,000 students. Out of these there are 286 high schools, with the rest catering for younger children.

According to the local department of education, girls made up 40 per cent of the student body.

"The rise in the number of female teachers is a huge achievement," said Shaima Said, head of the Nazo Ana high school in the fifth district of Jalalabad city. "We are delighted about it and so are the students."

"We only had a few female teachers in the past," she continued, "which meant that many elderly male teachers taught here. But now the number of women teachers have increased, and they too are delighted to be working."

Mahina, a newly appointed teacher in Nazo Ana, said that when she was younger most of her teachers had been male.

The opposite was now true, she continued.

"I always wanted to become a teacher so that I would help educate other girls. Today my dream has come true and I am a teacher in Nazo Ana. I want other women to start teaching too."

Ahmaz Zia Abdulzai, head of the Nangrahar's governor office, also welcomed the rise in the number of female teachers.

"The provincial office is working hard on this issue to provide facilities, increase the number of female teachers and solve the present problems of schools," he said.

Mohammad Asif Shinwarai, head of media for the provincial education department, said that his office supported a number of training centres for female teachers in various districts of Nangarhar.

But although large numbers of women qualify as teachers, many are denied the opportunity to go on to work.

Dawood Ibrahimkhail, chancellor of the Nangarhar Teacher's College, said that about 1,500 female students graduated every year.

However, around 500 of them did not go on to work as teachers due to opposition from family members as well as security issues and a lack of recruitment by the ministry of education.

Qari Deen Gul, a Nangarhar social activist, said that work was underway to increase grassroots support for female education.

“The rise in the number of female teachers is good news and we are continuing our efforts so as to convey how important girls’ education is for society through public awareness programmes in the more remote areas,” he said.

Ibrahimkhail agreed that still more remained to be done, adding, “We now have many more qualified teachers, both male and female, than the past and we are trying to professionalise the education system.”

The increase in the number of female teachers has important consequences for girls’ education.

Families are more likely to allow girls to go to school if they can be confident they will be taught by women. The students themselves feel more confident and feel free to participate in class.

“I am so happy now that I’m taught by female teachers,” Nazo Ana student Rana said. “I find it easy to ask any questions I have, but in the past I didn’t have enough courage to ask questions from my male teachers.”

*This report was produced under IWPR’s Promoting Human Rights and Good Governance in Afghanistan initiative, funded by the European Union Delegation to Afghanistan.*

**Location:** Afghanistan

**Topic:** Education  
Women

**Focus:** Promoting Human Rights and Good Governance in  
Afghanistan

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**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-province-sees-more-women-teachers>