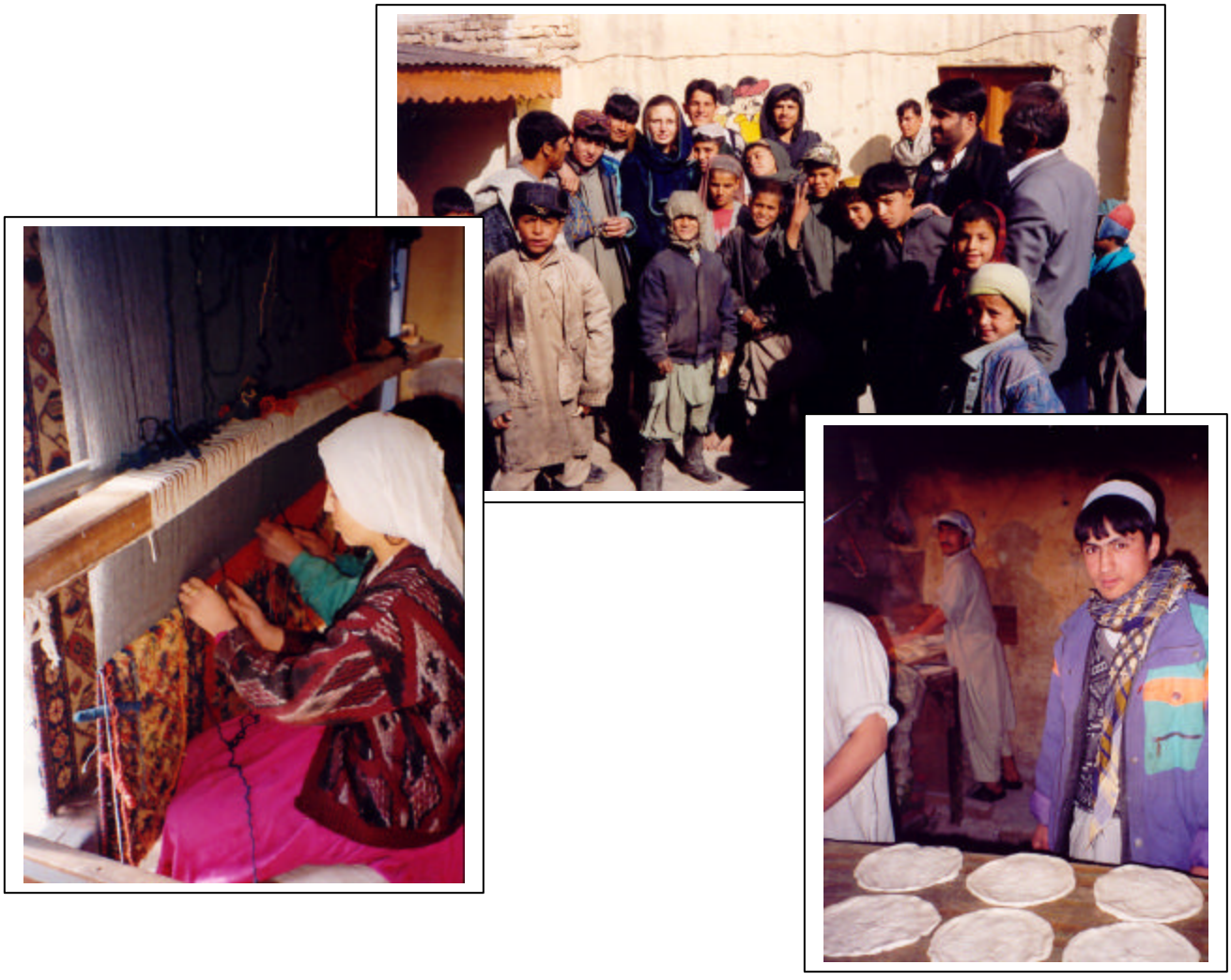
WOMEN'S COMMISSION
for refugee women & children

FENDING FOR THEMSELVES:

Afghan Refugee Children and Adolescents Working in Urban Pakistan



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

Mission to Pakistan - January 2002

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
tel. 212.551.3111
fax. 212.551.3180
wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-58030-020-0

MISSION STATEMENT

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children seeks to improve the lives of refugee women and children through a vigorous and comprehensive program of public education and advocacy. The Women's Commission is the only organization in the United States dedicated to speaking out solely on behalf of women, children and adolescents uprooted by war, violence or persecution. The Women's Commission was founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was researched and written by Jane Lowicki, Senior Coordinator, Children and Adolescents Project, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. It was edited by Mary Diaz, Director; Maha Muna, Deputy Director; Allison Pillsbury, Project Manager; Ramina Johal, Project Manager; Diana Quick, Director of Communications; Christine Gordon, Media Liaison; and Sabrina Kassam-Jan, field representative, Afghanistan/Pakistan, all of the Women's Commission.

For their assistance in Pakistan, the Women's Commission would like to thank: Françoise Theriault, Atle Hetland, Shanaz Parveen, Siama Imtiaz, Dr. Sasha Ali and Fawad Aamir, Else Berglund, Carin Sejdijaj, Anne Siri Rustad, Andrew Mbogori and Roy Herrmann, UNHCR; Raana Syed, Salma Jafar, Tsehaye Haile, Julia Dicum and Kim Vradenburg, UNICEF; Sifat Ullah and Shihab Sakib, Social Welfare Cell; Sigurd Hanson and Nina Papadopoulos, International Rescue Committee; Nayyar Iqbal, Sue Nicholson, Dr. Aminullah Amin and Noor Rehman, Save the Children – US; Abdul Jalil Yaqubi and Abdul Aziz Yaqubi, Shuhada and the Mari Abad Clinic; Sardar Iftakhar Khan, Abdul Rahim Ahmadi, Ahmadullah Khair Khowa, Nasreen Yousaf, Water, Environment and Sanitation Society; Palwasha Hassan and Dr. Shukria Noor, Afghan Women's Education Center and the Center for Street Children and Women; Ahmad Alhar Khairuddin, UMNO Youth Medical Mission Malaysia; Partwamina Hashemi, Afghan Women's Resource Center; Waqar Saleem, Caritas; Sippi Azerbaijani Moghadam; Sabrina Kassam-Jan and Salaam, Women's Commission; Eldrid Midttun, Tove Fischer and Inger Guddal, Norwegian Refugee Council; Save the Children – Sweden; Eileen Kiran Laldin, Church World Service; and Mastoora Basharza. Many thanks also to Allison Parker and Rachael Reilly, Human Rights Watch; Tone Dalen, UNHCR, Geneva; Marie de la Soudière, Benedicte Eagleton, Amy Wachtel and Rebecca Winthrop, International Rescue Committee; Christine Knudsen, Save the Children – US; Amir Haxhikadrija; Massimo Zucca; the Serena Hotel Quetta; and Dr. David Harriman. Most of all, thanks to all the working young people interviewed.

The Women's Commission would like to thank Gail Furman, the Mellon Foundation, the Moriah Fund, the Emerging Markets Benefit for Children's Charities, and individual donors, without whose support this report would not have been possible.

FENDING FOR THEMSELVES:

Afghan Refugee Children and Adolescents Working in Urban Pakistan

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

Mission to Pakistan - January 2002

Table of Contents

Introduction

Although precise numbers are not certain, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates, in the months immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes in Afghanistan in fear of United States-led retaliatory military action and fighting between Northern Alliance and Taliban forces, as well as inter-tribal conflicts. At least 200,000 of them fled to neighboring Pakistan, where they joined over two million other Afghan refugees and migrants who had fled armed conflict, persecution, drought, inter-family and inter-tribal conflict and economic deprivation in the decades following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. According to UNHCR reports in 2001, the majority of the new arrivals to Pakistan sought refuge in urban areas, mainly in two provinces: North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan.[1]

Fifty-nine percent of the more than 1.5 million refugees assisted by UNHCR in Pakistan in 2001 are children and adolescents under the age of 18, half of them girls. Women between the ages of 18 and 59 are 58 percent of the population.[2] The majority are ethnic Pashtuns, but there are also Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks and other minority groups among them. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that 3.6 million children work in Pakistan, [3] including tens of thousands of Afghan children.

Troubled by years of responsibility for Afghan refugees and with very limited international burden-sharing for their care, the Pakistan government did not warmly welcome the new refugees. Pakistan's borders were officially closed to the new arrivals. Those ultimately allowed to enter Pakistan, register and relocate to camps were permitted to do so only in designated areas that are distinct and separate from roughly 200 pre-existing refugee camps. Together with Pakistan government authorities, UNHCR is responsible for the protection and care of refugees in these "relocation camps," which are clustered in the Chaman area of Balochistan, along the border with Kandahar, Afghanistan, and in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), bordering NWFP and several provinces in Afghanistan near Kabul, the capital. Those entering urban areas did so by skirting official channels, and they joined the ranks of most other refugees in Pakistan who have not been able to secure refugee status and remain officially undocumented with few rights recognized by Pakistani authorities.

In this context, the Women's Commission conducted a mission to Pakistan January 16 - 31, 2002, to identify the protection and care concerns of Afghan children, adolescents and youth.[4] The concerns of refugee "street children" and other working young people living in urban settings were the main focus of the investigation. The investigation did not focus on documenting abuses previously or currently suffered by children and adolescents inside Afghanistan. While the investigation was limited to conditions in Pakistan, refugee children and adolescents in other areas, especially Iran, are likely facing similar circumstances. Findings presented here are based on group and individual interviews with more than 60 Afghan children, adolescents and adults, as well as dozens of local and international NGO, UN and Pakistan government representatives responsible for refugees. Young people's names have been changed to safeguard their protection.

---

[1] The number of refugees entering Pakistan and other countries of asylum in the second half of 2001 is highly disputed. UNHCR's "Provisional Population Statistics" released May 15, 2002 report 199,863 (p. 16) spontaneous new refugee arrivals in Pakistan. According to the same report, the Pakistan government estimates that it harbors more than three million Afghans (p. 10). No one ultimately knows how many are in urban areas.

[2] Ibid., p. 24.

[3] The ILO also estimates that 250 million children between the ages of five and 14 work in developing countries, 61 percent in Asia. Children's Rights: Child Labor, Human Rights Watch, www.hrw.org/children/labor.htm.

[4] The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." (Art. 1) International organizations, including UNICEF, World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), identify adolescents as

Executive Summary

International efforts to ensure the protection and care of at least 200,000 new Afghan refugees in Pakistan in recent months have followed a traditional pattern of neglect for those taking refuge in urban areas. Humanitarian assistance is favoring new arrivals residing in Pakistan government-sanctioned, United Nations-administered camps. Development assistance has also not significantly reached long-standing Afghan refugee and migrant populations, who stretched their thin resources to receive the new refugees. As a result, tens of thousands – perhaps the majority of the new refugees – have integrated into already struggling, pre-existing urban refugee communities in Pakistan with limited to no access to humanitarian assistance or protection interventions. Consequently, enormous child protection problems, including harmful child labor, have been greatly exacerbated.

With little means to support their families, many of the poorest parents from pre-existing and now new refugee populations are compelled to push their children to work in industries that place the young people at great risk. Thousands of children and adolescents are fending for themselves and their families as principal wage earners, with few options for education or other care. Thousands are carpet weavers, "street children" engaged in "garbage picking," beggars, brick makers, house servants and, in some cases, drug sellers. These activities expose them to physical and psychological abuse and disease. The work has also become more difficult for many in the wake of the September 11 attacks, as new refugee children have entered the competition for resources in Pakistan while employment opportunities and already low wages for refugees have diminished. Without targeted humanitarian assistance, the pressure on these young people to produce income is enormous, and most say if they refuse to attempt to find work, their parents beat them, and they will also go hungry.

Young urban refugees also face a range of other child protection concerns. Although it is not widely discussed or documented, sexual violence against girls and boys is believed to be widespread. Many girls are pressed into marriages at very young ages, and their older husbands do not always wait for their physical maturity to begin sexual activity, physically harming them and exposing them to dangerous pregnancies. Working young people also stated concerns about arbitrary arrest of their peers and adults by Pakistani authorities without access to representation, further worsening their socioeconomic situation and exposing them to abuse in jail. Few have access to or can afford health care or education. Life is especially difficult for Afghan minority groups living among the Pashtun majority in Pakistan, as they often face deeper discrimination than other Afghan refugees and have fewer opportunities.

What limited interventions do exist for refugees in these areas focus principally on those residing in camps, not in urban areas. United Nations and other international organizations say that the double standard in the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection stems from long-standing Pakistan government policies and actions to thwart refugee screenings and discourage work with Afghans in urban areas. Providing assistance and protection to a large, mobile, urban population is also not easy. However, traditional hands-off policies are a violation of refugees' rights to humanitarian assistance and protection. Lack of targeted support for development also hinders the fulfillment of their human rights. In addition, lack of care creates a push factor for Afghan relocation from urban areas to camps and for repatriation, the latter being the current priorities of the Pakistan government and the international community, but not necessarily the preference of the population.

Afghan young people working in urban areas are calling for equal treatment, now, not just in camps or later on in Afghanistan. They prioritize basic needs, including food, shelter and medical care. They also urgently want to fulfill their right to education with opportunities that will allow them to better provide for themselves and their families in Afghanistan or in Pakistan if they are unable to return. Girls, in

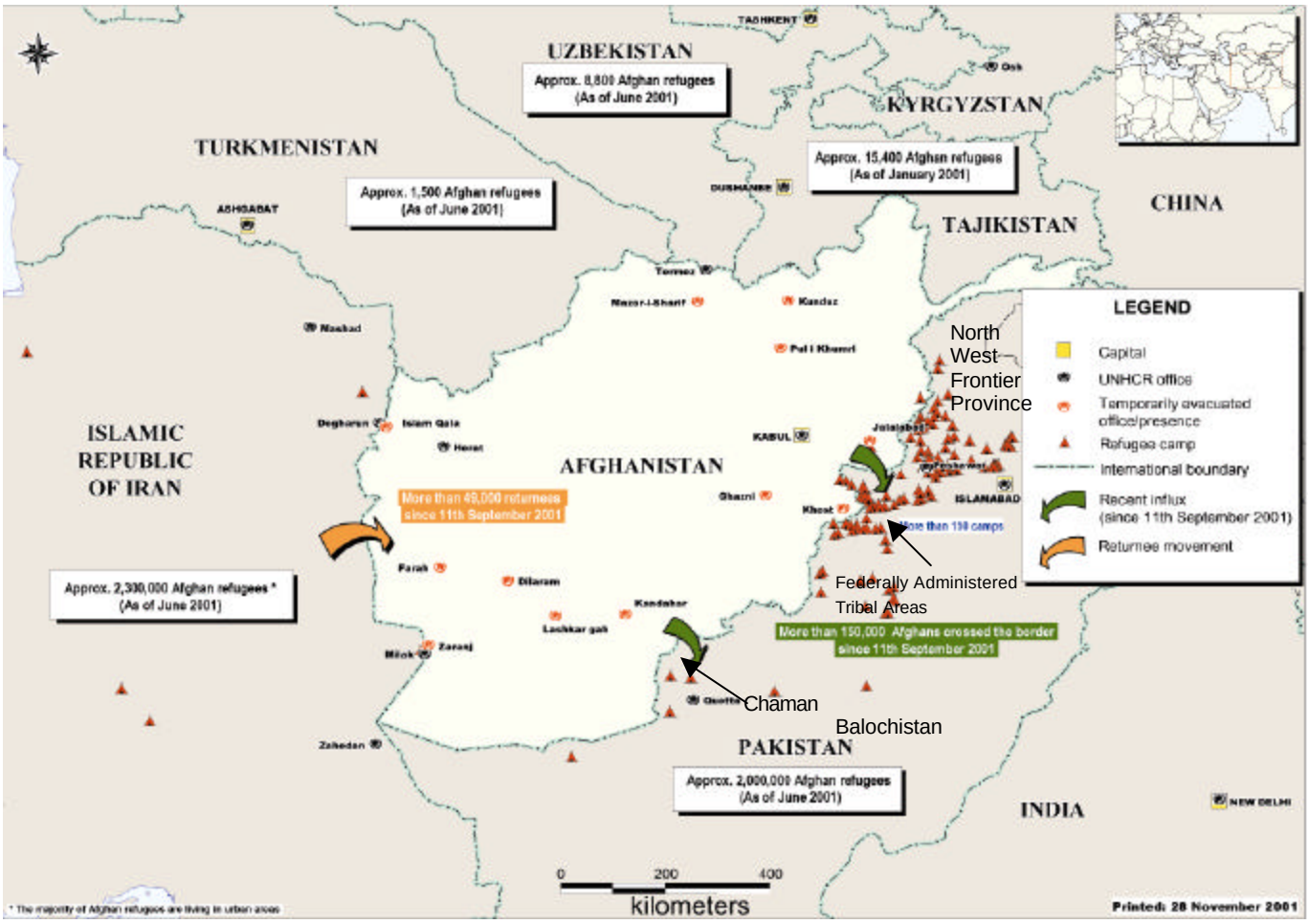
particular, view education as a means to a future of increased self-sufficiency and freedom from male dominance.

The government of Pakistan and international organizations must take immediate, concrete steps to end discrimination against urban refugees and migrants. They must increase their collaboration and work to support the capacity of local organizations and groups, including youth, to provide humanitarian assistance, medical care and education to the new refugees and the most vulnerable Afghans in the urban population, especially working children and adolescents. Young people and their families in urban areas must be fully informed of the availability of repatriation assistance and conditions in Afghanistan. Efforts to create and maintain peace in Afghanistan, which would allow Afghans to return home, must be aimed not only at preventing armed conflict, but also at resolving inter-family and inter-tribal conflict and ending poverty and gender discrimination. The distinct education, livelihood and other needs of urban refugee adolescents and youth must also be fully accounted for in reconstruction efforts. Individual refugee status determination and other reintegration assistance will be needed in Pakistan for those who cannot, or choose not to return to Afghanistan, despite strong political pressure on them to do so.

Ending key child protection problems, including child labor, requires long-term economic development commitments that comprehensively address poverty among Afghan, Pakistani and other communities in the region, in particular, addressing its relationship to protracted armed conflict. Community attitudes toward the rights and roles of girls and boys must also evolve to further support the capacity of all young people as constructive contributors to their society, with the rights to education, life free from sexual and other abuse and equal opportunity for girls and boys.

Young Afghan workers say the worst off in their communities are families headed by women, who have more daughters than sons. Girls' movements are more restricted than boys'. They have fewer earning opportunities, and their work is conducted closer to home. These Hazara girls – three of five sisters – recently fled the conflict in Afghanistan and now make carpets all day, every day in their rented home in Quetta to survive.

MAP


UZBEKISTAN
Approx. 8,800 Afghan refugees (As of June 2001)
KYRGYZSTAN
Approx. 15,400 Afghan refugees (As of January 2001)
TURKMENISTAN
Approx. 1,500 Afghan refugees (As of June 2001)
CHINA
TAJIKISTAN
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
North West Frontier Province
More than 49,000 returnees since 11th September 2001
Approx. 2,300,000 Afghan refugees * (As of June 2001)
Federally Administered Tribal Areas
More than 150,000 Afghans crossed the border since 11th September 2001
Chaman
Balochistan
PAKISTAN
Approx. 2,000,000 Afghan refugees (As of June 2001)
INDIA
LEGEND
Capital
UNHCR office
Temporarily evacuated office/presence
Refugee camp
International boundary
Recent influx (since 11th September 2001)
Returnee movement
0 200 400
kilometers
Printed: 28 November 2001

© UNHCR

Findings

Child Labor

- **Newly arrived refugee children and adolescents are engaged in harmful child labor practices alongside other Afghan young people in Pakistan from previous refugee and migrant flows.**

Thrust into an already extremely difficult economic situation for Afghans in Pakistan, many new refugee young people who arrived at the end of 2001 quickly took up tasks similar to those of other poor young people in urban areas to help bring desperately needed income to their families. Their activities include a wide range of harmful child labor practices, which the poorest Afghan young people have been engaged in for years in Pakistan. Thousands of children from about five years old and through their teens are "picking" or collecting and recycling garbage, weaving carpets, making bricks, begging on the streets and in buses, working in houses of wealthier Afghans[5] or Pakistani families, selling items on the streets and more. Many of these activities expose them to harm in an ongoing manner. They are at daily risk of physical, including sexual, and psychological abuse and exposure to disease. For example, "garbage pickers" collect and eat food that has been thrown away and collect used medical supplies – from syringes to urine bags – for recycling.

Most are pushed by their impoverished parents to engage in the kind of work they do, and the income they produce is often the backbone of survival for the whole household. While some take pride in their work, others suffer from feelings of humiliation, dejection and despair. If they are able to conceive of alternatives, all say they would rather be doing something else. Most say they would like opportunities for education and skills training that would allow them to find better jobs. But few have opportunities for education or leisure, and their health is regularly compromised.

The activities of girls, in particular, are especially limited due to the social segregation of men and women in society. Girls have difficulty earning as much as boys for a variety of reasons. Some girls do participate in "picking garbage" and begging, but for most, movement, and thus work, are confined closer to home. Many are engaged in the carpet weaving industry, which is often home-based. Girls are also mainly responsible for housework and work as domestic servants. For the girls who work for caring families, this work can produce opportunities for additional support, but in other cases, it can expose them to sexual and other physical abuse. Many girls told the Women's Commission that while they might get paid the same price for a carpet as boys, they cannot earn as much because they have additional responsibilities in the home and cannot work as many hours to complete carpets. Girls are also called upon to produce income for their families by marrying young to lessen the economic burden on, and bring goods to, their original family.

The child labor situation worsened following the September 11 attacks, as Afghan adults and children lost jobs, and the competition for limited resources grew. Consequently, there is more pressure on refugee young people to help pay for their families' basic expenses, and new refugees have joined the competition for work. The formerly lucrative carpet weaving industry, which relied heavily upon cheap Afghan child labor, bottomed out following September 11 as overseas buyers stopped placing new orders. New and old refugee children and adolescents now work weaving carpets hour after hour, day after day,

[5] While many Afghan refugees in Pakistan live in poverty, Afghan middle and upper classes exist. Afghan traders from urban areas in Afghanistan have been among those to settle as refugees in urban areas in Pakistan over the past decades, and many have had thriving businesses, despite restrictions on their labor. At the same time, poorer Afghans and others, rich or poor, afraid to live in refugee camps, have also settled in the urban areas. Since September 11, 2001, economic pressures have increased for almost all Afghans in Pakistan.

in dimly lit spaces, without recreation, education or health care, to earn less than half of what was previously possible. The legions of other refugee young people "picking" and recycling garbage on urban streets earn a pittance for their grueling work and may be harassed and abused by police and Pakistani community members. Many parents and young people are unaware or incredulous about risks involved with many of the occupations they engage in. A group of parents with working children interviewed by the Afghan Women's Resource Center in Peshawar before September 11 revealed that about half of them are fully reliant on this work for their survival and that parental knowledge about the dangers involved is limited.[6]

Main causes of child labor among the refugee population in Pakistan:

- Poverty and discrimination – few jobs for parents and low wages for Afghan workers
- Lack of humanitarian or other assistance
- Gender discrimination – inability of female heads of household to earn a living
- Low wages for child labor – more need to work
- Cultural, especially parental, attitudes – children expected and forced to work
- Lack of awareness of dangers involved with certain forms of child labor
- Lack of enforcement of legal standards prohibiting child labor [7]

Interviews with service providers reveal a strong need for up-to-date knowledge about the child labor situation in Pakistan and action for concrete alternatives. While there is no precise estimate of the number of Afghan refugees among the 3.6 million child workers the ILO reports are in Pakistan, tens of thousands of children and adolescents are known to be involved. Young people told the Women's Commission that if they chose to stop working, their parents would be extremely unhappy and would beat them and force them to work. Thus, changing parental attitudes and expectations about child labor is an important component of any response to the issue. Also, young people revealed that the worst off in their communities are families headed by women who have more daughters than sons. Given limitations on women's and girls' movements and activities, including income-generation, it is especially difficult for them to earn a living, and they require targeted attention for short- and long-term livelihood support.

While most working refugee young people stated a strong interest in education, and urgently called for humanitarian assistance to ease the pressure on their work and the emptiness in their stomachs, it is doubtful that increased assistance will end harmful child labor. Their communities are so poor, that even with support they would likely take any opportunity to earn more and continue to push young people to work. Also, many have not seen or experienced the benefits of boys' and girls' education to earning

[6] Women's Commission interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, January 18, 2002.

[7] On October 11, 2001, Pakistan ratified the ILO C182: Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999. Among other things, the convention defines "illicit and hazardous activities" as including work, which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. Hazardous work prohibited under the treaty includes "work in an unhealthy environment" and "work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer." (Article 3.) While poverty in Pakistan may make combating child labor difficult, in the case of refugee children, prohibiting the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in urban areas profoundly exacerbates the situation. Pakistan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which in Article 32 protects children from hazardous work and economic exploitation and requires minimum ages for employment and non-interference with education. Pakistan is not a signatory to the Minimum Age Convention, which stipulates that the minimum age of employment shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling or less than 15.

potential. Most cannot get through school due to economic constraints, and even if they did, finding work that pays sufficiently as an undocumented person in Pakistan is very difficult. Thus, tackling child labor will involve not only humanitarian assistance now, but also a long-term economic development strategy and commitment from governments that responds to the livelihood and education needs of all children and adolescents in the region. (See Obstacles to Humanitarian Response section below.)

Focus: Carpet Weaving

Question (to groups of carpet weavers aged five to 20): "What else would you rather be doing than sitting here weaving carpets all day?"

Answers: Blank stares. No responses.

Asking refugee children and adolescents what they would rather be doing as they sit at giant metal looms transfixed by their rhythmic weaving is an absolutely impossible question. Each is so lost in the tedium and despair of this painstaking work, alternatives are completely unimaginable.

Other questions about the routine are a bit easier.

Question: "When did you start working today?"

Answers: "About 5AM," one says. "About 7AM," replies another.

Question: "When will you finish?"

Answers: "8PM," the first says. "When it gets dark," the other says.

Question: "How long have you been doing this work?"

Answers: "Three years," a ten-year-old replies. "I started three months ago, since the war in Afghanistan. I'm 13," another says. "Since she was four," a mother says of her weaving daughter. "She is now 18."

These young refugees, and literally *thousands* of others like them in Pakistan, look like harpists as they sit perfectly erect on cloth-wrapped metal planks attached to the looms, deftly using their fingers and tools to maneuver colored yarn through hundreds of vertical wool threads strung before them. But instead of beautiful music, the sounds they make are the "*bang, bang, bangs!*" of their young hands pounding down their new stitches, and the score they follow is a tattered piece of paper provided by the traders depicting the carpet's design.

House after house in dizzying succession in the carpet weaving sections of Quetta and Peshawar, crams in multiple looms, one per family. Up to six families share one house in order to afford the rent, which sometimes must be paid months in advance. Each family lives in one room with no running water or electricity and limited natural or other light to see by as the work gets done. Two to six siblings – from four or five years old to those in their early twenties – work side by side, twelve to fifteen hours a day, taking only short breaks.

Question: "How much have you done today?"

Answers: One of two brothers working side-by-side points out a very thin but long strip of carpet achieved during the morning. "With our other brother, we do three meters in one month," he says, a relentless and astonishing pace in their dark corner of the house. Others say the more time and more people there are to work on a carpet, the faster it goes.

Parents, including many widows, stand by and watch production. One says, "We cannot make enough to meet our needs." Another says, "My husband and I are too old to do this, and other work does not pay enough."

Question: "How much do you get paid?"

Answers: "About 3,000 rupees per carpet, it depends on the size and design," one young person describes at the new Shamama night school for working children in Quetta, where the weavers' energy level and consciousness is utterly transformed and awakened. (Approximately 60 rupees equal US$1.) "It takes one month to make, and we must divide this between all of us," she says. One brother says of his and his sister's work, "The carpet we are working on has taken three months to make, but we are almost done. We will earn 5,000 rupees for this. Our rent is 1,200 rupees per month." Another girl, who works in a carpet weaving shop, as opposed to on a loom at home, says she earns "150 rupees a day."

Question: "Is this enough to meet your needs?"

Answers: "No," say nearly all who respond. "Our rent is 1,000 to 2,000 rupees per month, and there are other expenses," responds one adolescent.

One 20 kilogram sack of wheat flour used to make nan bread, a staple food in the region, costs 200 rupees. One portion of nan bought from a bakery is four rupees. Few can afford fruits and vegetables or other basic living items, including clothing and fuel for cooking and heat. One hundred kilograms of coal costs 600 rupees, lasting about three months. A short bus ride is five rupees, and a rickshaw ride to a medical clinic some kilometers away across Quetta costs 60 rupees. Many have to pay shop and loom rental or installment fees – from 3,000 to 15,000 rupees depending on the size – to Afghan traders. The young people sell the carpets to the Afghan traders who then sell them in bulk to Pakistani traders, who are licensed to export to high-priced carpet vendors in such countries as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy. (A randomly selected carpet vendor on New York's Fifth Avenue says a high-end eight foot by ten foot carpet from Pakistan costs $1,600. [8])

[8] Women's Commission interview, New York, May 15, 2002.

Question: “Why do you do this work?”

Answer: “We have so many problems,” an adolescent girl says and many others affirm. “We have no good shelter, no money; we are compelled to work.”

Question: “Is it absolutely necessary to work? What do your parents think about it?”

Answer: “Fifty percent our families are pushing us, fifty percent it’s absolutely necessary,” the adolescent girl continues, as affirmed by others.

Question: “What will happen if you disobey your parents and say you do not want to work?”

Answer: “We will be beaten if we say no,” many say at once.

Coming upon the carpet weavers’ homes, the signs of their work and its importance to the entire community are everywhere. Giant skeins of newly dyed wool sit atop buildings drying in the sun. Shopkeepers peddle every kind of carpet weaving tool. Little tufts of different colored yarn roll by the feet of passers-by.

“For six years the Hazara nation has lived in Pakistan, and ninety-five percent are weaving carpet, including 90 percent of our children,” says Haq Jeou, Chairman of the Islahi (Social Welfare) Committee and assistant of President of Haji Naeem Carpet Trade Union in Peshawar. “We need to increase knowledge and development in our community, but we also have basic needs. At least 2,000 of our families are in desperate condition and have never been assisted. If we weave carpets in relocation camps, it will be difficult to transport, as police will think it is imported from Afghanistan.”

Although refugee adults, including doctors and engineers, also weave carpet, thousands of refugee young people are the backbone of the carpet industry in Pakistan. But they have little bargaining power to gain a bigger piece of the pie.

Question: “How does this work make you feel? Are you tired? Is it dangerous?”

Answers: “Yes, tired! We work all day, with only a break for lunch,” says one girl weaver, who works at home. “Yes, it’s dangerous and is the cause of many sicknesses,” another says. “We have trouble breathing and get asthma and dandruff, too.” Many also complain of back pain, vision problems and sheer, incalculable boredom and exhaustion. For many, however, education is perhaps their greatest sacrifice.[9]

Question: “Do any of you go to school?”

[9] As reported in the Chicago Tribune, after four years, many young people have damaged eyesight, their lungs are contaminated by wool pile and their skin may have an adverse reaction to the dyes. Uli Schmetzer, Young laborers toil in Pakistan to help families; Fleeing Afghan children create glut of workers, Chicago Tribune, October 31, 2001.

Answers: "No," say all who work in homes. "This is our first time ever in school," say those at the new night school. One continues, "School was stopped because of war. [And anyway], our parents are narrow-minded. Even in Afghanistan, our parents didn't let us go to school, and we are backward because of this…But now, we are here, and they have to listen to us."

Amid the middlemen, rental fees, parental pressure, limited food, no education or recreation, young people have little energy for anything besides the existential task of carpet weaving, and their childhood and adolescence slip away day by day. But away from the looms, their parents and other pressures, young weavers in the night school are empowered to say that they hate "everything" about carpet weaving. Instead, they all agree, "Learning should be our job."[10]

Focus: "Street Children" – The "Garbage Pickers"

Contrary to typical understandings of "street children" in other countries, by all accounts, only a small portion of Afghan young people working on the urban streets of Pakistan actually sleep there at night.[11] Instead, most actually have homes to go to, but they are driven daily, mainly by abject poverty, to earn their living and support their families by doing any number of tasks under very difficult and often dangerous conditions. Like young carpet weavers, some have worked nearly their entire lives, with little access to education, recreation or health care, and they have been joined recently by many new refugee young people in Pakistani cities, arriving since the war in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001.

Some push heavy carts along the road in either blistering summer heat or chilly temperatures in winter, selling food or wares. Some beg other people for help on buses and along roads, often with a disabled elderly relative at their side. Others spend their entire day collecting various forms of garbage to be recycled for money, including most of the young people who come to the Drop-in Center run by the local NGO Water, Environment and Sanitation Society (WESS) in Quetta and the Center for Street Children and Women, an Afghan organization in Peshawar (see descriptions of their work below). They are the "garbage pickers." Almost all are boys, ranging from roughly five to 20 years old. They often work 12-hour days carrying heavy loads in very difficult weather conditions, breathing in air heavily polluted by vehicle emissions and dust. They are territorial, staking out claims to certain routes and areas of the city to work. They compete with one another, but at the same time, maintain solidarity and work hard to iron out their problems through "bargaining." These are some of their stories.

ABDUL is like the nearly twenty others spending time in one of two WESS Drop-in Centers in Quetta one Saturday morning in January. He is Afghan, a Pashtun, but he was born in Pakistan, and he has worked "picking garbage" on Pakistani streets since he was about five years old. "I have three sisters and three brothers," he says. "I'm the oldest. I'm 15. I live with both my parents. I do this job because my father is old, and we have economic problems. Every day, I come out about 7:00 AM, work until 12:00, and start again at 1:00 until the end of the day. I collect dry bread, in Mari Abad and where the Punjabi people live. I then sell it at a recycling place. It is later ground up and resold as flour for making new bread and as feed for animals. Some days I collect 12 kg or 20 kg. Some days I earn 20, 30, 60, 80 or more rupees, it depends on the situation. [If I collect 20 kgs, I earn] 160 rupees. I'm the only one earning money in my family. Our rent is 1,000 rupees per month, and I am able to earn just enough to meet our costs. The main problems I have with this work come if we go to the Pakistan Army area, and they

[10] Quotes drawn from Women's Commission interviews, Quetta and Peshawar, Pakistan, January 2002.
[11] The same holds true for Pakistani "street children." Afghan and Pakistani young people in these circumstances might better be described as "child street laborers" or "child workers."

misbehave with us;[12] or, in the Hazara community, they also create problems for us. In general, however, I like the work, but if I could do something else, I'd work in a garage. I went to school off and on for seven years, but I had to stop completely because of economic problems. When there is peace for sure, I'd also like to go to Afghanistan, to Kandahar."

"I'm **AHMAD**," another Pashtun boy introduces himself at the WESS Drop-in Center. "I'm 15. I live with my father, mother, six sisters and three brothers. I'm the oldest of the brothers. I started working when I was six years old. All day long, I move around in the city and collect paper – about 15 to 20 kilos per day. I earn 15 to 35 rupees doing that. My father is disabled, but he also collects plastics, and my mother does handicrafts. We have just enough to survive. Collecting garbage is a dangerous activity. We can get diseases. Once I was sick for six months with malaria. I was able to attend school for one year, but I had to stop for economic reasons. I would like to start work in a garage, but there are no opportunities and no money. It only pays 5 to 10 rupees per day, and this is not enough for our families. I would like to go to Afghanistan, too. When there is peace, then I will go."

Both Abdul and Ahmad agree that 5 to 10 rupees is not enough to allow them to take up garage training full-time. Abdul tried for two to three weeks, but the low salary stopped his efforts. A WESS counselor confirms, too, "I ask parents, 'Why aren't you sending your kids to work in garages?' and they say 'That is only bringing five to ten rupees [per day].'" Abdul and Ahmad also agree that what working Afghan young people in Pakistan need the most is "Money. We need money."

AMIR, at the Center for Street Children and Women in Peshawar, is one of the new refugees to arrive in Pakistan and take up garbage collecting. "I collect garbage, and sell it for money," he explains. "I earn 20 rupees a day, more or less, depending on what I collect. I use the money to buy bread and pay the rent. My father is too old, and he cannot go out and work, and among sons, I'm the oldest. I have six older sisters, and I'm the one who has to go out and earn something to eat. I'm 18 now, and I've been in Peshawar for three months. We came because America was bombing Tora Bora. I feel so embarrassed doing this work. I'm a big grown boy, and I'm collecting garbage, and these feelings are really hard for me. I would like to do anything except collect garbage, more education, carpentry, but not collecting garbage. Everybody abuses us. They scold us all the time and look down on us and tell us we're just coming to steal. All boys of my age would love to get education because it's good to be educated instead of wandering around streets collecting garbage. I used to go to school, but after the Taliban came, and there was war, everything became destroyed, and I couldn't go. We would be thankful to those who are really determined to go for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan to focus on the education side."

"I am **KARAM**," another adolescent introduces himself at the Center for Street Children and Women. "I am from Afghanistan. I'm 16 years old, from Kabul. I have brothers and one sister. My father is dead. He died in the US bombing of the city two months ago. I collect garbage in order to pay our rent. I started doing this as soon as I got here two months ago. My brothers and I have to work to support our family. It is very difficult to go out and do this. People treat us badly. If people can help young people, I would like to continue my education and become a doctor one day."

Each of these young people takes the goods they collect to recycling depots. The one nearest the Drop-in Center in Quetta takes cloth, plastics, paper, rubber, used medical supplies, metal, animal bones and more. "Each item has its own price," WESS staff explain. "Agents do the purchasing, first here and again in Karachi, where things are recycled. They take it, and after it's recycled, they will sell it again and make new things out of it. Some of the materials are dangerous, like this medical waste (pointing out an enormous sack of intravenous tubes and other items). Here's a urine bag that still contains urine in it, a

[12] WESS reported one instance in the past year when a number of "garbage pickers" were arrested by the Pakistan Army and beaten in jail. WESS intervened and won their release and stated that the situation has not repeated.

glucose bottle, pipes from ventilation kits.… It's made of high grade plastic; it sells for a better price." Standing over the urine bag and asked if they think this work is dangerous, another two young "garbage pickers" proudly say they don't think the work is so dangerous, although they admit injuries do occur. "If we thought it was too dangerous, we wouldn't do it," they say.

In addition to the exposure to the elements, disease-ridden food and waste products, potential injury and hostile communities, young Afghan "garbage pickers" noted particular concerns about police harassment. "Some areas we are not allowed to work," one young person in Quetta describes. "Sometimes the police [pick us up and] put us somewhere for a day, and we lose income." Although Women's Commission interviews did not reveal direct testimony of police brutality against young Afghan street workers, secondary sources did, and this should be the subject of further research and advocacy. Similarly, young street workers' exposure to sexual violence perpetrated by adult males, as discussed below, should also be further researched.

Interviews with new working refugee young people, veteran "garbage pickers" and NGO staff reveal that the number of Afghan refugee children and adolescents collecting garbage has increased due to the war in Afghanistan. "We have a lot of new refugees coming into the center," WESS says. "We have attendance and registration records that show this." The situation is the same for the Center for Street Children and Women.

While some young people feel proud of their work and others ashamed of it, virtually all say that if they stopped working, their parents "would be angry." Many parents cannot find jobs and are compelled to push their children to work. "Our parents say, 'You should bring something home!,'" one boy describes. "They will beat us if we don't." WESS staff also state that some parents even specify "such and such amount" the young people must bring home.

Most "garbage pickers" interviewed had had no more than one or two years of primary education, and all say they would like education opportunities. The most experienced "garbage pickers," however, tend to focus on vocational training for better jobs, such as garage work, as mentioned. One says, "We want to change our work, to get education and get skills training." They dream of being engineers, rickshaw drivers and master rickshaw mechanics, electricians, carpenters, teachers of these and other subjects, and more. They are very practical and want to increase their earning potential, while taking on jobs they consider to be more interesting and creative. At the same time, they also enjoy education for education's sake. At both the WESS Drop-in Center and the Center for Street Children and Women, they enjoy literacy, math and other classes available to them, even though some consider their time away from "garbage picking" a waste of time. With smiles on their faces, they explain to the staff that they come because, "We enjoy you people."[13]

[13] All testimony adapted and quoted directly from Women's Commission interviews at a WESS Drop-in Center in Quetta and the Center for Street Children and Women in Peshawar, January 2002.

Working in a Bakery

Masood is 17. He came to Pakistan from Afghanistan five years ago in search of income to support his family back home. He has not seen his family since, and has never been able to earn enough to send money home or go to school in Pakistan. He works all day in an Afghan-run bakery in Peshawar and sleeps there at night, earning 30 rupees per day (approximately US¢50). "My biggest problem is shelter," he says. "If I had a house, I could bring my family here… But anyway, I hope to return to Afghanistan soon. I'm fed up with this country. It's very difficult to earn a living, and they don't like us here."[14]
Masood wants to return home when there is peace and when he can bring additional income with him or at least a relief package to offer his relatives. While young Afghans like Masood are connected to friends and extended family in Pakistan, they require increased protection monitoring and targeted repatriation assistance.

Gender-based Violence

Sexual Abuse and Early Marriage

The Women's Commission heard reports from local and international NGO and United Nations workers about widespread gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, against girls and boys. Little documentation exists on the subject, which is taboo to discuss within Afghan society. No direct testimony of abuses was received during the investigation. However, Mr. Ahmad Alhar Khairuddin, mission leader for UMNO Youth Medical Mission Malaysia in relocation camps in Chaman and Rogani, said girls as young as 12 are presenting in their medical facilities with vaginal and anal bleeding. "This is resulting from early consummation of marriages to older men in their 20s and 30s," he said. "I consider that abuse."[15]

Adolescents themselves also verified that young girls are being pushed into marriage at younger and younger ages by their parents. They said that young girls are being married to older men so that the parents can find someone else to care for their daughters. According to one NGO report, some wealthier urban refugees are also marrying their girls to immigrants from Canada and the United States, who have consummated the marriages and subsequently absconded abroad. Some parents have been cautious, however, and prohibited consummation until immigration processes are completed.

Working "street children" are considered to be at particular risk of sexual abuse, including exploitation as prostitutes, by people they encounter during the day, and some "house girls" are believed to suffer abuse. Some believe boys to be at greater risk than girls as adult males have more access to them than they do girls. Both boys and girls are also believed to be at strong risk of incest in some areas. Traditional Afghan culture tends to blame the victim of sexual violence. In the worst case scenario, families may kill survivors to purge the family of dishonor they believe is brought on by the abuse. Currently, girls and

[14] Women's Commission interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, January 21, 2002.
[15] Women's Commission interview, Quetta, Pakistan, January 2002.

boys facing gender-based violence, and in the case of girls, unwanted pregnancy, have few places to turn. Medical clinics ill equipped to offer a full range of social services end up picking up the slack. A new Safe Shelter Project sponsored by UNHCR is attempting to deal with some of these cases and others stemming from domestic violence. Community structures that will be relied upon to cope will continue to need capacity building support, including in negotiating community attitudes.[16]

Trafficking and Sale of Children for Sexual or Other Purposes

There were no reports of abducted or missing persons from new refugee camps or urban areas at the time of the investigation, when UNHCR data collection systems were not yet fully in place. Once data collection systems are fully functioning, it will be easier to track those missing from camps. However, no data collection system is planned for refugees in urban areas. Anecdotal reports, not substantiated by this research, included information about girls going missing from families fleeing Afghanistan, possibly abducted by fleeing Taliban members, and of recruitment of young Afghan males into fighting forces from inside Pakistan. They also included reports of the sale of children through abduction and by poverty-stricken parents inside Pakistan for economic and sexual purposes. The "Dawn" newspaper in Pakistan ran a story in January, "Children's Kidnapping on the Rise," describing gangs abducting children for ransom, sale abroad into the "Camel-kid game" and forced prostitution.[17]

Other Protection Concerns

A host of other child protection concerns were raised beyond the immediate scope of the Women's Commission investigation. The following are some of these, which require further research and urgent action.

- **Voluntary Repatriation Assistance and Refugee Status Determination –** Refugees in urban areas require full information about conditions in Afghanistan and about repatriation assistance so that decisions to repatriate are made voluntarily. Recognizing that children may become separated from parents or caretakers or may face other dangers along repatriation routes, UNHCR staff must be fully trained to recognize and respond to their protection needs and rights. At the time of the investigation, UNHCR Community Services staff expressed concern about the need to immediately implement such training and monitor follow-up. As more and more Afghan refugees repatriate to Afghanistan, those who are undocumented and cannot or choose not to return, including children and adolescents, will increasingly need refugee status determination. They will also continue to need assistance with durable solutions, including potentially local integration in Pakistan, an unpopular option with the Pakistan government. Without these fundamental forms of protection, Afghan refugee children, adolescents and their families, will remain at greater risk of rights violations within Pakistan, where thousands still have no legal status and few rights under Pakistan law.

[16] See McGinn, Colleen, *Sexual Abuse of Afghan Refugee Children in Northwest Pakistan: Patterns, Perceptions and Responses,* Women and Children Safety Program and International Rescue Committee Pakistan/Afghanistan, August 2001.

[17] The "camel-kid game," as practiced in Iran, involves gambling on dangerous sporting competitions between camels jockeyed by children who have been forced to be involved. Dawn newspaper, January 2002. The article describes the abduction of Pakistani children for this practice.

- **Situation of Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) –** While it is widely believed that the number of Afghan unaccompanied minors in Pakistan, or children without parents or close guardianship, is extremely few, the reality is, no one really knows. Afghan culture provides for the protection of children and adolescents through an extended family structure, so that even if young people are not with immediate relatives, they are not considered to be alone. Some young people told the Women's Commission, however, that while young people might live with extended family, they are not necessarily fully integrated into family life and may not have access to the wealth of the family. The families they are with may be poor and unable to care for them. Some young people feel compelled to work on the streets in order to earn their own keep. While Afghan communities also monitor the well-being of their members by associating in groups of families, community elders, leaders, parents and other adults may not always follow up on the protection needs of young people. Thus, the situation of UAMs or children living with extended family in urban areas, should be further monitored.

- **Arrests, Incarcerations and Deportations Without Due Process or Representation; and Torture and Sexual Abuse in Pakistani Prisons –** Both child and adult Afghans interviewed reported frequent harassment by Pakistani authorities, including arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and at times deportation without due process or legal representation. They described torture, sexual abuse and other ill treatment in prisons, as well as the extortion of money from relatives to win the release or improved care of the incarcerated. Human Rights Watch corroborated accounts it received of these violations, in some instances including children, in *Closed Door Policy: Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran*.[18] UNHCR protection staff are aware of the problems and work on a case-by-case basis to assist refugees of all ages in these situations, but more needs to be done. No one agency in Pakistan has information on all refugees in prison and their circumstances, and few have the resources to address all of their legal services needs. UNHCR, however, stated a willingness on the part of the Pakistan government to attain the release of refugees in jail on petty charges.

- **Drug Smuggling, Selling and Abuse –** The Women's Commission received anecdotal reports from local NGO workers of young people becoming engaged in drug production, selling and smuggling in Pakistan. Some involved accounts of "street kids" in Quetta migrating to Karachi to find work, including in the drug trade. These young people are reportedly at risk of drug addiction, physical abuse, arrest and even disappearance. The Women's Commission also heard anecdotal reports of drug use, particularly heroin, and addiction among adolescents in Quetta.

Education

- **Refugee young people working in urban areas, especially girls, have extremely limited access to education opportunities and require distinct education initiatives in Afghanistan and Pakistan that support their livelihood and life skills.**

Nearly all of the dozens of working refugee young people interviewed by the Women's Commission had had only one-to-three years of primary school, no schooling at all or were just beginning new special classes for out-of-school working adolescents. The only exceptions were two teenaged boys, who had made it as far as secondary school but were unable to continue due to financial constraints. All cited the main barrier to education as lack of money to cover basic living expenses and school-related costs. They

[18] See Alison Parker, *Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, Closed Door Policy: Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 14, No. 2(G), February 2002.

also said their work schedules prohibit participation in regular daytime classes, and girls said cultural constraints, including low value placed on girls' education by parents and their early socialization into the roles of homemaker and mother, are reasons for their low attendance in school.

"All of us in teenage [years] must work very hard," said one adolescent girl in Quetta, now attending a new night school for carpet weavers sponsored by the Afghan NGO Shuhada, known as the Shamama School. "Even in Afghanistan, our parents didn't let us go to school… We couldn't come to school in Pakistan either, because the government schools are very expensive. But this school is free, so, for many of us, this is our first time."[19]

The Shamama night school in Quetta, supported by the Afghan NGO Shuhada, provides the only opportunity many working girls and boys have had for education. These girls are carpet weavers. They say they enjoy all their classes, from religion to math, and are particularly thankful to the school's director and its teachers for their work with them. Their main request is for ongoing support from anyone to help them enhance their facilities. Electricity, heat, basic learning supplies and ultimately computers are all of interest.

Local and international NGOs confirmed this pattern of minimal access to education among the poorest in the Afghan community, especially working children and adolescents, girls in particular. Technically, Afghans have had access to Pakistani schools, but these schools have attracted mainly small numbers of the wealthy elite among Afghan society. Young people living in urban areas told the Women's Commission that few have attended because costs are too high, classes are taught in Urdu, which most do not speak, and they are generally not encouraged to attend by Pakistani communities. Many also said they want to go to "Afghan schools," preferably in Afghanistan. A 16-year-old working adolescent said, "I do not want to go to a Pakistani school, I want to go to an Afghan school. I'll go when I get back to Afghanistan."[20]

A number of self-help schools for Afghan refugees have been set up with assistance from UNHCR's Community Services section, involving international and national NGOs, including mainly Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Save The Children – US (STC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Social Welfare Cell NGO of the Pakistan government. The majority of these schools were set up in refugee camps, although several were established in urban areas to address the education needs and rights of refugees there, including those run by STC in Quetta and by IRC in Peshawar.[21] A wide network of Afghan private schools – "Afghan schools" – were also established in urban areas, but again, the poorest refugees in these areas, including working children and adolescents, could not attend. Little vocational or other skills training has been available.

[19] Women's Commission interview, Shamama School, Quetta, Pakistan, January 26, 2002.
[20] Women's Commission interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, January 21, 2002.
[21] IRC reports that four of the 38 schools it supports as part of a Female Education Program are in urban areas. Three of these have been supported since 1992 and the fourth since 1994. The nine newest schools to receive support, since 2001, are in New Shamshatoo camp, NWFP. "IRC Female Education Program Annual Report July 2000 – December 2001 for the Banyan Tree Foundation," Appendix, Table 1.

Home-based schools have also worked to increase the number of girls in school, again mainly in camps, but they have not reached most girls. In all of these scenarios, girls have been more or less successful at taking advantage of education opportunities given a number of factors, including: cultural, especially parental, attitudes toward girls' education; early marriage; and responsibility for domestic chores and income generation. Some Afghan refugee families, particularly those from urban areas like Kabul, specifically came to Pakistan as refugees in order to secure their daughters' right to education. By contrast, others keep their girls at home, viewing their main purpose as housework and eventual marriage. Still others have more responsibilities than boys, combining paid work and housework, which monopolizes any potential learning time.

Even in settings where more education opportunities are available, maintaining girls' attendance is difficult. STC-US, in Quetta, stated that their education statistics show high levels of drop-outs in the latter years of primary school, particularly girls by grade four. STC told the Women's Commission that it also takes many years of commitment to improve girls' education. After many years of STC working with the community to build an education program based mainly in camps in Quetta, which stretched beyond their usual mandate and includes secondary education opportunities, a small but encouraging number of girls are only just recently completing level seven, the highest level of primary school.[22]

Despite economic, social and political barriers to their getting an education, working children and adolescents universally expressed a strong desire for a range of educational opportunities, from formal schooling to vocational skills training. They want better jobs that lead to increased income and the possibility of a better life. They also just enjoy a welcome break from their tough work schedules. Working girls also stated that education would help increase their self-sufficiency and freedom from male domination. One young woman working as a carpet weaver in Quetta said, "I'm 20. I've been here five years, and I've worked the entire time. I could not go to school in Afghanistan, and this is my first time in school [referring to the Shamama School]. I want to earn by myself, to provide food for myself and eat. I don't want to be under the hand of men."[23] Girls also said education would help them become teachers or doctors. Many working boys said they wanted training to become mechanics, shopkeepers, engineers and headmasters (school principals).

These young people need distinct education interventions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, should they be able to return. The newest urban refugee young people should be provided emergency education interventions, especially the most vulnerable in the urban areas, including child workers, emphasizing the psychosocial and protection benefits of education. New refugee children in relocation camps are receiving formal education, but no similar support has gone to refugees in urban settings. When appropriate, efforts should also be made to provide humanitarian assistance to families in exchange for a commitment to sending their children to school. More poor Afghan refugee children should also be sponsored to attend school. Many Afghan adolescents, who have lost many years of schooling if they indeed ever went to school at all, will have difficulty returning to formal education systems and will need catch-up classes or accelerated learning courses to get them back into the system in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Many will never be able to take advantage of such interventions given responsibilities for income-generation and other interests, and will require vocational skills training and tools. All young people interviewed also stated a general interest in learning, desiring life skills, language, religion, health, mathematics, sports and other classes.

[22] Women's Commission interview, Save the Children-US, Quetta, Pakistan, January 24, 2002.
[23] Women's Commission interview, Quetta, Pakistan, January 26, 2002.

Obstacles to Humanitarian Response for Working Children and Other Refugees in Urban Areas

Urban Areas Are Minimally Targeted for Refugee Relief

- **Refugee children, adolescents and their families in urban areas in Pakistan face discrimination in the provision of humanitarian assistance and international protection as camps are principal targets for relief; responses in urban areas are at best *ad hoc*; and minority communities are particularly in need.**

Working Afghan children and adolescents living in urban areas of Pakistan told the Women's Commission repeatedly that the struggle to meet basic needs is among their biggest problems. "I need shelter," a 17-year-old boy who lives and works in a bakery said. "We need money to pay our rent and buy food," said a 15-year-old girl who weaves carpets all day long to earn income for her and her family's survival. "We don't get any humanitarian assistance or medical care," her mother said, "and there are no jobs for us here."[24]

While refugees living in camps also experience extreme economic hardships, the poorest living in urban settings are often worse off because they are discriminated against in the provision of international humanitarian assistance and protection. The thousands of new refugees entering urban areas at the end of 2001 have received limited to no targeted humanitarian assistance, despite international pledges to assist all fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan. They have come to be called "the invisibles" – people who are systematically unrecognized by the Pakistan government and neglected by major relief efforts. Many of these refugees have found shelter by integrating into households with extended family members, who are ill equipped both economically and logistically to support them. Others have found houses to rent, including some that they previously vacated before returning to Afghanistan on other occasions. Still others have constructed makeshift homes out of cloth and sticks in empty lots or alongside other existing mud homes, providing limited shelter from the elements or protection from predators, particularly at night.

This Hazara mother (center) in Peshawar said she has no way to pay the rent for the room in which she and her family live. Her children weave carpets all day, but it is still not enough, and she worries especially for her disabled daughter, who she says has nowhere to turn for medical help. She found an Afghan trader (pictured beside her) to assist them with their rent, but he says he and other traders cannot help everyone, and even with help, all of their needs are not met.

Refugees in urban areas have had few places to turn for help. Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and has not consistently recognized all Afghans as refugees. Frustrated over lack of international assistance to deal with the millions of refugees within its

[24] Women's Commission interviews, Peshawar and Quetta, Pakistan, January 2002.

borders and concerned about domestic destabilization, Pakistan has rarely permitted refugee screening and registration and has only officially permitted international groups to work with refugees in designated camps.[25] Subsequently, a standard, albeit often regretful, refrain heard from representatives of UNHCR, the lead agency for refugee relief and protection in Pakistan, was "We don't work with urban refugees." UNHCR cited long-standing political pressure from Pakistan not to do so as the main barrier, along with lack of resources and logistical constraints. UNICEF Pakistan has also not stepped in to comprehensively assist Afghan children in urban areas despite its wider mandate to address children's issues throughout the country, citing UNHCR as having a superceding responsibility for refugees. Without recognition as refugees or access to registration, without living in a camp, and as the buck is passed regarding responsibility for their care, urban refugees have no access to international protection and assistance.

"We don't work with urban refugees." -- UNHCR

Instead, UNHCR has relied principally on international and local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to pick up the slack, a task they have been unable to fully accomplish without substantial support. UNHCR has also attempted some behind-the-scenes work with staff eager to help, but these efforts have been inconsistent and have not resulted in substantial change. Recently, UNHCR Peshawar's Community Development Office was tasked with organizing local Afghan groups to link more systematically with bilateral donors to help channel urgently needed humanitarian assistance funds to the community, but the effort was halted precipitously. Work to address a variety of child protection efforts in urban areas has also been piecemeal. At the time of this research, some very limited bilateral assistance from governments and NGOs was getting through to new urban refugees, but it was uncoordinated and far from meeting the needs. As examples, UNHCR told the Women's Commission it helped to distribute 2,000 blankets donated by Médecins du Monde and divide a GB£1,600 (GB£1.6 equals US$1) individual donation among 70 widows in urban areas. Pakistani students also distributed 140 food packets and used clothing to new arrivals in urban areas, and Caritas attempted to identify and target several pockets of new urban refugee arrivals with relief supplies. Church World Service has also worked with local organizations to get food and other support to urban refugees, new and old.

As the Pakistan government and the international community focus squarely on repatriation as the next vital step for Afghans in Pakistan, urban refugees are faced with difficult choices: stay in towns where there might be extended family support or limited employment; go to relocation camps where a plot of land, a tent, non-food items, food, health care and formal education for children are provided; or split the family up, keeping part in town and part in the camp. Minority groups face particularly difficult choices, as they are discriminated against in the wider Pashtun-majority Pakistani and Afghan communities in Pakistan, often facing lower wages and fewer job opportunities in urban areas and conflict in mixed camps. Relocation camps designated for minority groups have been established, but members of the Hazara community interviewed, for example, are waiting to make any moves as a whole community and have not yet transferred in large numbers to relocation camps despite enormous economic hardship.

All refugees interviewed said they would very much like to return to Afghanistan as soon as possible. Most said, however, they would go back only when they were assured of peace. Many also stated a desire

[25] Pakistan's treatment of Afghan refugees has a checkered history, including among other things *refoulement*, or refusing to allow refugees to cross into Pakistan, and arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan under the Foreigners Act and Order and other laws that discriminate against foreigners. In 1999, the Pakistan Government revoked *prima facie* refugee status to new arrivals. For an excellent review and analysis of Pakistan's history of treatment of Afghan refugees, asylum seekers and other foreigners vis à vis international refugee protection standards, including current concerns, see Alison Parker, *Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, Closed Door Policy: Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 14, No. 2(G), February 2002.

to wait for the winter months to pass and said they need money and other material and transportation assistance to return. They want to be assured of shelter, schooling and livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan. Some also said they could not return until family or tribal conflicts were resolved.

As they wait and judge their repatriation prospects, lack of assistance has compelled some urban refugees to move to the temporary relocation camps being set up by the United Nations under the authority of the Pakistan government for new arrivals.[26] In the process, to make ends meet, some families have begun to separate, with some members transferring to camps to find assistance and others, including young people, remaining in towns to attempt to earn additional income.[27] Within the camps, too, refugee families are separated as space is allocated, and many attempt to move their tents in order to stay together. Traditional extended family protection structures are thus beginning to break down, the consequences of which for children and adolescents are yet to be seen.

> *President Bush said that Americans were giving to help every Afghan child. Where's the help for* these *Afghan children?* – Afghan trade leader, Peshawar, commenting on assistance to urban working refugee children.

The double standard in the provision of assistance contradicts principles of equal treatment and places an unfair burden on the communities that are struggling to support the urban refugees. If every urban refugee suddenly decided to enter a relocation camp, there would not be enough capacity to support them. Yet, those providing support in the local community are getting little help in doing so. There are legitimate logistical challenges involved with getting humanitarian assistance to the urban refugee population as cited by UNHCR Peshawar, including that the population is mobile and hard to track and that differentiating between new refugees and old refugees and determining needs is difficult. But local community members, some UNHCR staff and others state these issues can be resolved with the help of local NGOs and community leaders, who know the population and are ready, willing, able and eager to take more comprehensive action. Indeed, not taking action is a violation of refugees' rights to humanitarian assistance and protection and diminishes the well-being of children and adolescents in urban areas.

Current Initiatives Fall Far Short of Meeting Child Protection and Assistance Needs and Rights

- **Lack of humanitarian assistance and insufficient international protection, combined with poverty, cultural constraints and a lack of education, are contributing to a range of protection problems for children and adolescents in urban settings, including harmful child labor, early marriages and sexual abuse.**

In a domino effect, the exclusion of urban refugees from international humanitarian assistance has exacerbated negative child protection conditions, especially harmful child labor described above. The

[26] Refugees in urban areas have been permitted to register for relocation with no questions asked about whether they are new arrivals or old arrivals, thus addressing the problem of deciphering between the two groups.

[27] Travel between Quetta and relocation camps in Chaman is reportedly much easier than between those in FATA and Peshawar. FATA has become notorious for its poor road conditions and security concerns stemming from inter-tribal conflict and anti-foreigner sentiments among some of its residents. Thus, refugees choosing to relocate from urban areas to camps in NWFP will face extremely limited freedom of movement in NWFP.

focus of international child protection efforts on new refugees in camps also continues to eclipse the issues of young people in urban areas. Interviews with United Nations representatives and other service providers revealed widespread knowledge of these and a range of other child protection problems and eagerness to work more on them, but action is so far limited.

Within UNHCR Pakistan, most child protection activities are centered in the Community Services section. Community Services implementing partners in the "new refugee emergency," including the International Catholic Migration Commission in Balochistan and the Social Welfare Cell NGO of the Pakistan government in NWFP, are focused on the situation in the new relocation camps. No clear data exists on how many children and adolescents live in urban settings in Pakistan, and there is no comprehensive monitoring of the protection of refugee children and adolescents in the towns.[28] The UNHCR protection office does work with urban refugees on resettlement and other issues and is undertaking an important new Safe Shelter Project[29] that will assist urban refugees to find safety and recover from domestic and other violence, but representatives say there are many child protection issues in urban areas that remain in need of urgent attention. Facing major resource limitations and political constraints, Protection Officers at UNHCR Peshawar told the Women's Commission that if they could do more to address children's issues they would prioritize the situation of Afghan "street children" and the provision of legal services for Afghan children in trouble with Pakistani authorities. When asked what the main barrier to doing this work is, one replied, beyond basic resources, "Just getting started."[30]

UNICEF Pakistan has included out-of-school youth, adolescents and child protection among their priorities in its five-year plan, which includes Afghan, Pakistani and other children's and adolescents' issues, including the situation of "street children." Many of these activities, however, are still in the research and planning stages. Studies are planned on out-of-school youth and child protection, as is the formation of youth groups and possibly funding for a youth-run project for out-of-school youth. UNHCR has also asked UNICEF to assist in the humanitarian response to the new refugee arrivals, but again, this work is focused in camps. The deadlock over which United Nations organization should take principal responsibility for the protection and care of urban refugee children and adolescents must be broken through increased cooperation for comprehensive and immediate attention to their situation.

The ILO has launched a new program to provide alternative schooling for working children in Pakistan in order to curb child labor without depriving impoverished families of needed income. According to the ILO, the project involves ten thousand children enrolled in ILO schools being taken out of work for five to six hours a day to attend school, and after that they return to work. The Women's Commission has been unable to confirm if any of the beneficiaries of this campaign are or will be Afghan refugees. This initiative should include them and can be a focal point for coordinated action between UN organizations, NGOs and community members addressing refugee child labor.[31]

---

[28] Unlike in Balochistan, UNHCR Peshawar staff working with the refugees arriving in the "new refugee emergency" are not simultaneously working with the long-standing refugee population. While this may provide financial and administrative clarity and responds to political pressures to keep the caseloads separate, it further clouds the relationship between the situation faced by urban refugees – new or old – and those faced by refugees in camps. Ultimately, they will all need the same information and opportunities for assistance in repatriation or reintegration, and ignoring the needs of those in the towns may hinder these processes.

[29] The Safe Shelter Project will provide assistance and protection for up to 30 children, adolescents, women and men, who are suffering domestic or other abuse and cannot return home.

[30] Women's Commission interview with UNHCR protection staff, Peshawar, Pakistan, January 21, 2002.

[31] The carpet industry, which employs 125,000 children in Pakistan, has donated $1 million, while the U.S. Department of Labor has provided $2 million for ILO programs adapted to working children. UNWire, PAKISTAN: ILO Offers Alternative Education For Working Children, February 14, 2002.

Local Groups Assisting Working Refugee Children and Adolescents

The following are just a few of the local organizations, groups and individuals working to assist working refugee children and adolescents in urban Pakistan. Each has direct information about the range of child and adolescent protection concerns in the community, and their work urgently requires ongoing support.

Center for Street Children and Women – This Afghan organization in Peshawar provides opportunities for women, girls and boys to learn and receive health services and moral support. Young workers, including "garbage pickers," girl house workers and others enroll in the center and learn skills, such as carpentry for boys and tailoring for girls and women. Young participants range in age from five to about 20. The center provides a safe respite from life working on the streets and in homes, and offers hope and concrete skills for a better economic future. Many participants also take literacy and language courses, and childcare services are provided to mothers. Like other local organizations, the Center plays a critical role in providing social support to the community and regularly assists some of the "most vulnerable" to resolve individual problems they are facing. Director Palwasha Hassan is a strong advocate for women and children refugees and for relief efforts in Pakistan and now reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan that address their needs. Of urban refugees, she says, "Education, health and other humanitarian assistance are totally neglected in urban areas." While the Center has received funds from the Canada Fund, Care International, the Global Fund for Women and other groups it remains in strong need of ongoing support.

Shuhada – This Afghan NGO has worked for years to address the social, economic and health issues of Afghans both inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Among other things, they support numerous schools, health clinics and hospitals and a science college, all of which have provided some of the only services available to Afghans during the war, especially for women and girls. They have also worked consistently to get emergency assistance to new refugee arrivals, including in urban areas. Their projects often serve as critical social service projects, even if they were not ostensibly created for that purpose. Staff at times assist in resolving family conflicts, including, for example, with regard to the community's treatment of girls with unwanted pregnancies. The night school for girl and boy carpet weavers described above provides one of the only options for education for these poorest and most burdened of refugees. More

than a dozen donors have assisted Shuhada in its work, but the need still far outweighs the services it is able to provide, particularly for child workers. One Shuhada representative said that, "[the refugees living in] the city, who are not registered in camps, are ignored and forgotten."

Young people interviewed at the Shamama School, a new and unique night school for boy and girl carpet weavers in Quetta, sponsored by the Afghan NGO Shuhada, stated they love to learn everything. When asked what they would rather do than weave carpets, they first said "Anything!" and then more specifically, "Learn. We love all subjects."

Water Environment and Sanitation Society (WESS) – WESS operates two Drop-in Centers for "street children" in Quetta, where young people can come, take tea and bread and attend a variety of classes – mainly literacy and numeracy. Outreach workers also counsel the young people and at times intervene with Pakistani authorities when the kids run into trouble. They also meet with parents and elders, in part, to win permission for the young people to attend the center. "About 300 young people come regularly to one center and 200 to the other, and many more come from time to time," says representative Sardar Iftakhar Khan. "Few girls come to the center, mainly because their brothers stop them."

WESS traditionally worked on water supply and sanitation issues in the region but identified the important recycling role the young people were playing in the community. At first, they became interested mainly in offering the young people some relief from their hard work. "It was about creating a safe environment away from their hazardous one," says Mr. Khan. But as they learned about the complexity of the problems they face – from police and parental abuse to health problems and drug addiction – they are challenged to identify new directions for the project. "It's a difficult job," says Mr. Khan. "We've learned a lot, and we're moving toward addressing social and community issues. The young people need help to come out of the poverty cycle with training and better jobs." WESS is doing strategic planning to determine next steps for the project, including potentially micro-credit, non-formal education, child protection monitoring or other forms of social services. Save the Children-US and Oxfam have been principal supporters of their work. Other donors are interested in funding the project, but WESS is cautious about over-funding it before considering input from others with expertise working with young people in similar circumstances. Young people's involvement in making decisions about next steps will be critical.[32]

[32] All information and citations for this section from Women's Commission interviews with local NGO program staff and participants in Quetta and Peshawar, Pakistan, January 2002.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed to a variety of actors, including the government of Pakistan, international and local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), United Nations agencies, and local Afghan community members, including young people themselves. Where specific roles are emphasized, particular actors are noted. As much as possible and where appropriate, Pakistani young people should be included in the following initiatives.

- **Provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the "most vulnerable" refugees in urban areas, including child and adolescent workers.**

  - Donor governments should work closely together and with the government of Pakistan, NGOs and United Nations agencies, especially UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, the United Nations Development Program and the ILO, to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees in urban areas in Pakistan; these efforts should be linked to repatriation and development initiatives targeting the refugees' and host communities' needs and strengths.

  - The poorest, and otherwise "most vulnerable" among the entire Afghan urban refugee population, including working children, adolescents and their families, especially female-headed households, should be prioritized for assistance.

  - The provision of food, medical care, education and livelihood support should be prioritized, thereby also enhancing the protection of refugee children and adolescents.

  - International donors and other humanitarian actors should consult, support and involve local Afghan NGOs and community-based groups in Pakistan in efforts to identify new refugees and other refugees most in need of assistance and undertake programs with them to respond to their needs and rights.

  - UNHCR's Community Development Office should be fully supported in its efforts to link international donors directly to local organizations and groups to expand humanitarian responses to urban refugees.

  - Emergency education initiatives should be undertaken in urban areas for new refugees and other interested refugee young people to provide them with psychosocial support and protection through structured learning activities, including recreation, language classes, literacy, skills training, formal education and other classes as identified by the young people.

- **Take action to ensure refugee child and adolescent protection in urban areas.**

  - Institute a refugee child protection monitoring system in urban areas, beginning with pilot projects tied to the provision of humanitarian assistance and education activities. Involve young people directly in efforts to identify protection problems among their peers and referrals for friendly, confidential care. In so doing, the Save the Children Alliance Protection Monitoring tool, which is being used in relocation camps for new Afghan refugees, could be piloted in a couple of urban neighborhoods, by involving local community groups and ensuring adolescent and older youth participation in the process.

- Create and promote the use of safe spaces for play and recreation for refugee young people in urban areas, including separate activities for girls and boys and older or younger adolescents as necessary, and make information on humanitarian and repatriation assistance available to young people in these spaces.

- Provide wind-up radios to young people in camps and urban areas and increase their access to youth-focused radio programs addressing concerns specific to them, including health and protection issues.

- Ensure all UNHCR, NGO, military and other personnel along repatriation routes are trained and equipped to identify and address child and adolescent protection issues.

- Fully anticipate the need for durable solutions for refugees wishing to stay in Pakistan or unable to return to Afghanistan, including unaccompanied children and adolescents, such as refugee status determination, legal assistance vis à vis Pakistan judicial authorities and resettlement to a third country.

- Increase initiatives for resolving inter-family and inter-tribal conflict, recognizing that barriers to returning home to Afghanistan do not stem solely from persecution.

- Expedite research and action on a wide range of child protection issues, including, among others: juvenile justice; gender-based violence; and related to this, distribute, discuss and act widely on UNICEF research in the areas of out-of-school youth and child protection.

- Support the capacity of young people to help themselves and one another by engaging them directly in the implementation of programs, including peer-to-peer protection monitoring.

- **Emphasize action for child and adolescent protection that raises awareness about, prevents and supports young people's recovery from gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence.**

  - Work with CBOs, especially women's and youth organizations, to identify and implement ways to increase community discussion and knowledge about adolescent reproductive health and social concerns, including access to health care services, early marriage, trafficking and sale of girls and boys, sexual violence and recovery assistance, and community stigmatization of sexual violence survivors.

  - Implement programs for survivors of gender-based violence. Support UNHCR's Safe Shelter Project, while maintaining its low profile. Assist community groups in addressing widespread negative and punitive attitudes towards the survivors of sexual violence, and increase the capacity of institutions and families to provide support to those who suffer this and other forms of violence, as current social norms and institutional capacity do not meet the needs.

  - All efforts related to the reconstruction of Afghanistan should take into consideration child and adolescent protection implications. For example, codes of conduct for international and local personnel working with young people should be developed, implemented and monitored, including constructive and viable mechanisms for response, which do not place young people at further risk in ensuring their freedom from exploitation, sexual abuse and other harm.

- **Improve working conditions for refugee child laborers, and create and promote alternatives to child labor in the short and long terms.**

  - Create job opportunities for and promote humanitarian assistance to refugee parents, especially working mothers, to alleviate the need for child labor.

  - Recognizing that providing humanitarian assistance and additional wages to parents will not solve the child labor problem alone in the situation of dire poverty for many in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the region, target development initiatives in ways that promote education opportunities for working girls, boys and parents to find skilled jobs that produce significantly higher income, demonstrating the value of education to earning potential.

  - Advocate for and enact measures to ensure a larger share of profits are passed on to child laborers as wages, through reduced hours of work for the same pay and/or with the provision of other services, including education and health care. In so doing, UN agencies, NGOs and community members should act together to ensure that refugee children and adolescents working in Pakistan benefit from the ILO initiative to provide flexible work schedules and education opportunities to child workers in Pakistan.

  - Change the attitudes of parents and community members toward harmful child labor through awareness campaigns about the dangers of some forms of work and about the right of young people to leisure, play, education and more.

  - Provide child workers with clear information about the dangers of the work they are undertaking and how they can minimize the risks involved. Support their regular access to doctors and other safeguards, such as improved lighting, face masks, gloves, etc. It is wrong to assume that all children do not want to work and earn money for themselves and their families, but it is right to assume they are interested in information and opportunities to enhance their safety, skills and income.

  - Support projects for working boys and girls run by local NGOs, like the Center for Street Children and Women, Shuhada and WESS. Assist these organizations, as necessary, in redefining their goals for working children, to enhance advocacy components and improve programs needed for the young people.

- **Provide education and livelihood support to working young people repatriating to Afghanistan or integrating into Pakistan.**

  - Include the specific livelihood and education needs of working adolescents, especially girls, in repatriation, reconstruction and reintegration planning and initiatives, as well as in long-term development planning in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This planning should include: catch-up classes for adolescents who have missed basic education opportunities; vocational skills training for young people, whose labor is relied upon by their families; secondary school and university opportunities; conflict resolution and life skills training; health education and more.

  - Girls, boys and mothers in female-headed households must be especially targeted in these initiatives.

Women's Commission
for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
212.551.3088/3111
wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org